

THE ROLE OF UNITED STATES ARMY SPECIAL FORCES
IN OPERATION NOBEL OBELISK

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ABSTRACT

THE ROLE OF UNITED STATES ARMY SPECIAL FORCES IN OPERATION NOBEL OBELISK, by MAJ Francis M. Beaudette, 100 pages.

Future political and social upheaval on the African continent will continue to endanger U.S. citizens living abroad. Deployed Special Forces operational detachments are ideally suited to assist joint task forces in the execution of noncombatant evacuations. The central research question is: How did U.S. Army Special Forces contribute to the success of a joint noncombatant evacuation operation (NEO) in Sierra Leone? The first step examined the events of Operation NOBEL OBELISK and to a lesser degree Operation FIRM RESPONSE. The second step examined available doctrine to determine if it was sufficient to effectively prepare a detachment for noncombatant evacuations. The final step determined the primary lessons learned and recommendations necessary to prepare a Special Forces operational detachment alpha for future mission success. The analysis of Operation NOBEL OBELISK recommended that SFODAs play a vital role in the successful conduct of NEOs. This additional mission requirement should be addressed in the initial planning phases for any team deploying outside the United States.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AFRC	Armed Forces Revolutionary Council
APC	All Peoples Congress
CDF	Civil Defense Forces
DCM	Deputy Chief of U.S. Mission
DoD	U.S. Department of Defense
DoS	U.S. Department of State
ECOMOG	Economic Community of West Africa Cease-Fire Monitoring Group
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EO	Executive Outcomes
FCE	Forward Command Element
JCET	Joint Combined Exercise for Training
METL	Mission Essential Task List
MEU	Marine Expeditionary Unit
NEO	Noncombatant Evacuation Operation
NPRC	National Provisional Ruling Council
POI	Program of Instruction
RPG	Rocket-propelled Grenade
RSLMF	Republic of Sierra Leone Military Forces
RSO	Regional Security Officer
RUF	Revolutionary United Front
SFODA	Special Forces Operational Detachment Alpha

SOCEUR	Special Operations Command, Europe
SOF	Special Operations Force
UN	United Nations

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

United States citizens abroad represent America officially and unofficially throughout the world. Their right to safety is addressed in U.S. national security and national military strategies. Overseas American citizens will face greater risk as future potential adversaries become more lethal, unpredictable, and organized. Due to regional political and social instability, the African continent remains the area of the world with the highest potential for this threat. One way to mitigate this risk to American citizens is to remove them from any unstable situation with a noncombatant evacuation operation (NEO). Noncombatant operations are conducted in support of U.S. foreign policy when they are necessary to protect U.S. lives. The Department of Defense currently has the capability to execute these difficult missions within its special operations community. Operations EASTERN EXIT in Somalia in 1991 and ASSURED RESPONSE in Liberia in 1996 are examples of the effective use of special operations forces (SOF) in NEOs. SOF have contributed in some manner to almost every U.S. NEO conducted in the past thirty years. This thesis will examine U.S. Special Forces contributions to Operation NOBEL OBELISK, a Marine-led joint NEO in Sierra Leone in 1997. It is further intended to examine how Special Forces can contribute to future NEOs. By understanding basic doctrinal tenets and some general lessons learned, Special Forces operational detachments will be better prepared to assist a future NEO joint task force.

The preface of the current U.S. *A National Security Strategy For a New Century* states that the three national security core objectives of the United States are: "To

enhance America's security, to bolster America's economic prosperity, and to promote democracy and human rights abroad.”¹ This document additionally states that first categories of national interests, our vital interests, are “those of broad, overriding importance to the survival, safety and vitality of our nation. Among these are the physical security of our territory and that of our allies, the safety of our citizens. . . . We will do what we must to defend these interests, including, when necessary and appropriate, using our military might unilaterally and decisively.”² American embassies abroad are national property and are primarily staffed by dedicated American citizens working in the diplomatic community. They are located throughout the world, often in remote regions, where the U.S. chooses to maintain a national and diplomatic presence. The “security environment in which we live is dynamic and uncertain, replete with a host of threats and challenges that have the potential to grow more deadly.”³ Diplomatic missions must concern themselves with “regional or state-centered threats, transnational threats, the spread of dangerous technologies, and failed states.”⁴ The U.S. must ensure that its military maintains the capability to provide immediate security to American citizens in time of crisis. This allows the U.S. government to demonstrate full diplomatic commitment and a dedication to its allies while remaining engaged as long as possible in time of crisis. The U.S. must have the rapid capability to respond to regional instability and violence near American embassies. The Department of Defense must ensure that U.S. diplomats can remain at their posts as long as possible to explore and employ all diplomatic resources. When these attempts at diplomatic conclusions are exhausted, the U.S. military must be prepared to evacuate safely those Americans who need assistance.

Operation NOBEL OBELISK is an example of how United States military assets, specifically Army Special Forces, were able to assist in execution of tactical and ultimately strategic national security objectives. By joint and combined efforts with the United States Marine Corps, British, Nigerian, and loyal Sierra Leone forces, Army Special Forces contributed to the success of Joint Task Force NOBEL OBELISK. This operation led to the eventual safety of in excess of 2,500 civilians. Many of those civilians were United States citizens.

In February of 1996, Sierra Leone held, “for the first time in almost 30 years, their first truly democratic multiparty elections to elect a president and parliament and put an end to military rule.”⁵ Those unique elections proved to be a “rare moment of hope, and one which led many observers, both within and outside the country, to be optimistic about the future of democracy and the rule of law.”⁶ Unfortunately, twenty-seven people died on election day, revealing the intense tension remaining in Sierra Leone following five years of insurgency. In May and June of 1996, the United States House of Representatives and Senate adopted a concurrent resolution praising the “elections held on February 26, 1996, and the subsequent runoff election held on March 15, 1996” as “deemed by international and domestic observers to be free and fair and legitimate expressions of the will of the people of Sierra Leone.”⁷ This resolution and positive steps by Sierra Leone towards an effective democracy led to the reinstatement of U.S. military-to-military contacts with the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces. In February of 1997, a Special Forces Operational Detachment (SFODA) from the 3rd Special Forces Group (Airborne) was tasked to develop a training plan intended to assist

in the development of a new Sierra Leone Army. From that point until June, the SFODA was directly involved in the political turmoil of this deeply troubled nation.

This thesis focuses on the noncombatant evacuation executed by Joint Task Force NOBEL OBELISK. It specifically addresses the actions of the Special Forces team that was engaged in Sierra Leone for several weeks prior to the NEO. The thesis identifies the critical roles that the detachment played in support of overall mission execution. It additionally stresses potential future measures to be taken both prior to and during deployments to ensure that operational detachments are continually prepared for the possibility of rapid political destabilization. It analyzes information common to both noncombatant evacuations to provide additional references to actual operations. The primary question addressed is, What was Operation NOBEL OBELISK, and how was the participation of the Operational Detachment Alpha instrumental in its success? The secondary question addressed is, Are there any required changes to joint and Army doctrine or tactics, techniques, or procedures to increase the probability of Special Forces mission success in future noncombatant evacuations? Finally, the tertiary question addressed is, What is the appropriate level of coordination, both before and during a mission, required between a deployed operational detachment and joint and interagency elements, especially the Department of State?

The necessity of future NEOs is based on several underlying assumptions. First, this type of regional political instability and violence will only become more prevalent; therefore, the potential for further execution of these missions concurrently becomes more probable. The second assumption is that regional engagement will continue to be executed at its current pace. This engagement may even increase as requirements evolve,

thereby placing Special Forces soldiers in countless forward and remote areas. In this sense, Special Forces will continue to serve as the “global scouts” for major regional combatant commanders. A third underlying assumption is that Special Forces are prepared to support NEOs based on inherent operational skills. NEOs are not, nor should they be, missions that Special Forces units specifically train for. All primary mission requirements for NEOs are trained when Special Forces units conduct basic mission essential task list (METL) training. This mission is not new to the requirements placed on Special Forces, which remain a viable and appropriate option when the benefits of their employment are required to protect U.S. lives and interests abroad.

The democratically elected government of Ahmad Tejan Kabbah’s Sierra Leone People’s Party inherited a legacy from the past six years which included extreme irregular warfare within its borders, a military dictatorship brought on by a successful coup, massive corruption, and continued economic and social instability. The Revolutionary United Front (RUF) and its leader, Benghazi-trained Alfred Foday Saybana Sankoh, continued in its mission to undermine the legitimacy of the Kabbah government and destabilize the country. Foday Sankoh, jailed in 1971 for a coup plot against Siaka Stevens, had once been a corporal in the Sierra Leone army. Upon his release, he found work as a freelance photographer in southeastern Sierra Leone. “He later found his way into a radical study group in the Bo-Kenema” area and following Libyan ideological training became involved in the RUF.⁸ Although Mr. Sankoh was detained in Abuja, Nigeria, in 1996 following peace negotiations, the RUF continued to operate freely in the interior of Sierra Leone.

The root cause of Sierra Leone's most recent instability began in 1991 and sprang from the civil war in Liberia, its southern neighbor. Charles Taylor, the rebel leader of Liberia, instigated the infiltration of Sierra Leone by two rebel contingents of the RUF. Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia coerced disaffected Sierra Leoneans and Liberians or Burkinabe from Guinea to invade Sierra Leone from the east and south. Foday Sankoh, supported by Taylor, led this small force of 150 into Bomaru in Kailahun district. They initially used strategy and tactics from the Liberian experience and met with reasonable success. The RUF initially envisaged support in a border region opposed for many years to the oppressive All People's Congress (APC) government. Unfortunately, the RUF soon seized and summarily executed chiefs, traders, village elders, agricultural project workers, and other government agents. They also forcibly recruited youths and received the support of many disenfranchised illegal miners, smugglers, and petty criminals.⁹ Torture, mutilation, rape, and looting became their primary operational methods. This RUF insurgency had such a destabilizing effect on Sierra Leone that Valentine Strasser led a military coup that overthrew the government in 1992.¹⁰ The National People's Ruling Council (NPRC), led by Strasser, promptly suspended the constitution of 1991 and ruled Sierra Leone until 1996. During the Strasser regime, the armed forces understandably enjoyed considerable prestige and favoritism from the military NPRC. Ironically, some of the basic issues favorably accorded to soldiers during this time became primary grievances following the Kabbah elections. Some of the initial statements made by the Armed Forces Ruling Council (AFRC) following their coup indicated that the soldiers were tired of being ill-fed and not paid.

While the NPRC neglected the effective governance of Sierra Leone, RUF rebels continued to gain momentum in the interior. Their tactics had favorably shifted to meet the threat posed by the army. The rebels now moved in small, remotely based detachments and struck at military and civilian targets throughout the country. Although they only hit “soft” targets with squads or platoons, the general impression in Freetown was that they held command of the entire interior of the country. This was not the case. The primary concern of the NPRC remained to increase personal wealth for the leading minority. Although the RUF remained primarily a criminal group without effective political ideology, they were able to point at the lack of distribution of wealth from the country’s diamond mines. In early 1995, the capital city of Freetown was pressured by small groups of rebels. The government’s position was saved only by direct military intervention from Nigeria and the mercenary firm Executive Outcomes.¹¹ Nigeria’s military intervention began in support of its military operations in Liberia in 1991, primarily as a means to safeguard its rear area.

In 1991, the Organization for African Unity requested that The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) act to stabilize the situation in Liberia. Shortly thereafter, the military arm of ECOWAS, the Nigerian-led Economic Community of West African States Cease-fire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), intervened in Liberia. An offshoot of this intervention was the massive influx of Liberian refugees into Sierra Leone. Additionally, ECOMOG was concerned by the ability of RUF and Liberian guerrillas to influence the situation in Liberia from Sierra Leone. The interior of Sierra Leone, isolated and poorly governed, served as a sanctuary for guerrillas who were operating into and from Liberia. Nigeria, under the auspices of its ECOMOG charter for

Liberia, initially posted two infantry battalions in Sierra Leone to assist with refugees and contain the RUF. The Nigerians continued to grow to over 2,000 by 1997, and with United Nations (UN) and U.S. support, it would eventually overthrow the illegitimate AFRC of Major Johnny Paul Koroma.¹² Executive Outcomes, hired by the government with cash from diamond sales, also served in a direct combat role. They provided counterinsurgency training, conducted limited raids on “valuable” mining targets, provided aerial delivery and rotary-wing close air support, and intercepted rebel radio traffic.¹³ They were marginally effective and left country following payment.

Bowing to international pressure in 1995, military dictator Valentine Strasser finally admitted that he was unable to govern the nation properly. His inability to control the RUF and deteriorating situation, both in Sierra Leone in general and within the army, were the root causes. He lifted the ban on political parties, invited the RUF to conduct peace negotiations, and offered the nation the opportunity for general national elections. Although RUF leader Foday Sankoh had made his own overtures towards peace, the RUF refused to cooperate or take part in elections. They were on a military upswing and did not want to jeopardize momentum. A national consultative conference followed Strasser’s announcement, and the people of Sierra Leone were promised a national election. In January 1996, a second military coup led by Brigadier Julius Maada Bio overthrew the NPRC. Although the civil situation again deteriorated into general lawlessness, the political situation actually stabilized to the apparent benefit of the country. Bio went ahead with the national elections of 26 February that elected President Kabbah.

The RUF responded to the elections with a two-month cease-fire, and peace negotiations with Kabbah ensued. Although extreme civil unrest and violence between all factions now normal for Sierra Leone followed until the end of the year, the nation now had the democratic government it desired. The military was immediately and rightfully looked at with suspicion. They had been unable to control a poorly trained, lightly armed, and fractious RUF. Additionally, they had become worse than the rebels in their treatment of civilians. In September 1996, Major Johnny Paul Koroma attempted to overthrow the government of President Kabbah but failed and was jailed in Freetown's Pademba Road jail. Finally, on 30 November 1996, the government of Sierra Leone and Foday Sankoh signed the Abidjan Accord promising peace in their troubled nation. Neither side abided by the accord, and violence, including massive atrocities against civilians, continued. Sankoh was detained by Nigeria but the “lifestyle” of the RUF continued.

According to an analytical study conducted by the Foreign Systems Research Center, “President Kabbah could keep himself in power only by establishing his moral authority, by proving himself different from his predecessors, and by carrying out the popular will.”¹⁴ Understanding its newly found support from the United States, the Kabbah government contacted the United States and requested support with a military-to-military contact training program. They needed direct support to assist in building an entirely new and politically secure army. The Kabbah government felt that the current military core was rotten, primarily composed of former National Provisional Ruling Council “sobels,” soldier-rebels, current RUF rebels, criminals, and disaffected or lumpenized youths.¹⁵ It was. The overall intent developed by the Kabbah government

was to screen applicants carefully from their current military to identify any loyal and trustworthy soldiers. They then wanted this loyal core to be jointly trained by the U.S. and United Kingdom (U.K.) militaries. Following successful completion of this training, these soldiers would form the 1st Battalion of the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces. Eventually, several battalions would be formed in the same manner. This stable force would then be used to conduct operations against the ongoing insurgency in the interior of this diamond-rich nation and finally to defeat the RUF. Ideally, this force would be sufficiently fed and paid. Additionally, the need for the Kamajors, a Mende tribal militia hunting and society numbering several thousand, would be negated. If a loyal and trustworthy military unit could conduct effective battalion-sized operations in the interior, without looting, raping, or terrorizing local citizens, immediate gains would be made against the RUF. The RUF had no political or ideological base and were cut off from the people. Basic military discipline would in effect create a functional civic action program by leaving noncombatants alone. Unfortunately, this simple although idealistic paradigm would never be attained. The number of loyal and noncorruptible soldiers who adhered to national and international law may have filled a rifle platoon.

In April of 1997, SFODA 334 deployed to the Republic of Sierra Leone to execute a Joint-Combined Exchange Training (JCET) rotation. The U.S. Ambassador and Sierra Leone minister of defense jointly approved this routine training mission. The tasked detachment received the initial concept of training through its higher headquarters. The basic plan, developed by the ODA, was to train a 300-man light infantry battalion, the RSLMF 1st Battalion. The mission was expected to last three months and was divided into five phases. The first phase was the predeployment phase and involved

traveling to Sierra Leone to visit the Ministry of Defense. The members of this predeployment site survey team conducted several meetings with senior defense officials where they detailed deployment missions, goals, and objectives. They proposed a plan based on the application of sequential training beginning with individual, collective, and unit-level light infantry tactical training.

The initial plan called for the Special Forces team to train the battalion's soldiers and noncommissioned officers for forty-five days. A British team composed of a major and warrant officer would concurrently train the thirteen-to-fifteen officers of the battalion's command and control staff. Both elements planned to join for the final phase of collective training and battalion-level operations. This final phase would last for approximately forty-five days. Once a basis for training was agreed upon, the Special Forces soldiers returned to their base and began developing an applicable program of instruction (POI). This POI would take essentially raw soldiers and develop them to the point where they could conduct effective counterinsurgency operations. Additional goals involved instruction on U.S. Army values, the laws of land-warfare, military professionalism, and the important delineations required for the successful development of loyalty to a popularly elected civilian government. Following national and international laws was stressed. The training plan was written in English to accommodate the official language of the Sierra Leone government. Although not all trainees spoke sufficient English, the detachment believed that fellow soldiers would provide effective translation into local and tribal dialects. This type of translation is common in training that involves numerous languages. Once all training development

was complete, appropriate rehearsals were conducted, and planning was finalized. At this point, the detachment was ready for the second phase, deployment.

The detachment flew into Lungi International Airport located across the harbor entrance from Freetown. The airport is approximately two hours by road from Freetown and is capable of handling large transport aircraft. A ferry service, which crosses the mouth of the harbor, can cut the movement time between the airport and the capital city to forty-five minutes. The detachment moved its equipment over land to the designated training center using a high mobility multipurpose wheeled vehicle (HMMWV), with trailer and three trucks from the Sierra Leone army. The Sierra Leone Ministry of Defense determined that the best location for the training was the Benguema Training Centre, located approximately one hour from the capital city of Freetown. Colonial British forces originally established the Benguema Training Centre as a base of operations. The base was located at the foot of jungle-covered mountains and housed the soldiers and their families. It was typical for that region of the world having some forty small buildings. Small generators powered a few rooms on the base, and all water was drawn from wells. The base did have a well-constructed firing range and reasonable large area to conduct dismounted maneuver training. Communications from the base included host-nation telephone, the detachment's tactical radio, and tactical satellite telephone. The base at Benguema, located near the village of Waterloo, is strategically astride the narrowest geographic feature of the main approach route to Freetown. That route consists of a somewhat winding two-lane paved road in reasonable condition. The capital city of Freetown is located on a mountainous, heavily vegetated peninsula linked to the mainland by this narrow stretch of land. Benguema was the ideal selection based

on its ranges, facilities, and location. The base commander Lieutenant Colonel Sonny Koroma was coincidentally the older brother of Major Johnny Paul Koroma, leader of the Armed Forces Ruling Council that conducted the subsequent coup.¹⁶ Also, there was a Liberian refugee camp established on the Waterloo airfield, approximately one mile from the training base. Twenty-four hours following arrival at Benguema, the detachment was ready to begin phase three of the operation.

Phase three was the actual employment phase of the training. The team was housed in a long, one-story building surrounded by a thatched fence approximately twenty meters from the building. It had been occupied the year prior as the primary headquarters for the mercenary firm Executive Outcomes. The building had six rooms and was without electricity. The small compound also had a small cistern to store water and a shower room that was fed by a small pipe running from a nearby mountain. Water flowed into the cistern and shower room immediately following any rain. The detachment began its training and proceeded with its detailed program of instruction. The trainees were receptive and excited about all training presented. They were divided into three maneuver companies by the team and remained focused. They fully understood that not more than thirty miles away, a six-year-old insurgency replete with countless atrocities continued. They also knew that following training they would be sent to the front to eliminate the RUF. Most trainees were combat veterans and understood rudimentary English. Up to five additional tribal dialects were spoken, and internal translation assisted all soldiers to grasp the intricacies of the training. Progress continued at a steady pace until the third week, when the immediate requirements of the insurgency took priority over preparation.

Revolutionary United Front rebels launched a surprise offensive against the capital city at the beginning of May 1997. Unfortunately, they were able to make progress toward Freetown and caused great concern in the city. President Kabbah determined that his primary consideration was to maintain the fragile stability of his government. If any rebels appeared near Freetown, the potential outcome would be a repeat of the 1995 debacle. The inability to cope with the RUF would grievously undermine this government's ability to stay in power. The trainees were notified in a collective formation that although only a small fraction of the training had been completed, operational requirements necessitated their immediate deployment to combat. The army chief of staff Brigadier Hassan Conteh came to the Benguema Training Centre the same evening to personally inform the battalion that they would deploy to the front the next morning. Violence ensued and indiscriminate small arms fire erupted throughout the compound. Although the detachment was able to assist in returning order to the base, the situation remained volatile. Brigadier Conteh fled by vehicle as soon as it became apparent that his "order" was not well received. His immediate entourage kept him from being harmed by any unruly soldiers.

This event was the first indication that soldiers in the army's new loyal battalion had not been properly screened. The feelings throughout the compound towards this order were intense. The soldiers felt that they were not ready to deploy and that they were being unfairly used without having had the ability to gain valuable and effective training. Additionally, they did not have confidence in their leadership. This was the first time that President Kabbah ordered his soldiers to fight, and it was imperative, from the government's perspective, that they follow national directives and deploy. By the

next morning when transportation assets arrived, time, alcohol, and marijuana had essentially diffused most soldiers' tensions, and decisions had been made. Sierra Leone's only operational MI-8 heavy lift transport helicopter arrived to deploy the advance party, primarily consisting of the unit's officers. Undisciplined soldiers from Training Company C initially fired at the MI-8 with small arms, but it was eventually allowed to land on the soccer field. Approximately thirty soldiers from the same company then released some additional frustration by moving from the soccer field landing zone to the adjacent mess hall. They physically assaulted the base's cooking crew and overturned the day's lunch rations of "slicky" soup, made from a green weed. They apparently felt that they had received less food than the other line companies. The detachment medic had to provide immediate medical care to two of the unfortunate cooks. This was not an auspicious beginning to a critical national-level deployment by Sierra Leone's only "strategic reserve."¹⁷ The Kabbah government continued to face the same problems that plagued the NPRC military in their fight against the RUF. The "sobel" soldier-rebel issue was not, nor would it easily be, corrected.¹⁸

Two hours after the arrival of the helicopter, military trucks drove into the compound and formed up to load and transport soldiers to the bush. Unfortunately, some soldiers chose not to deploy, hid their weapons, and disappeared into the local surroundings, including the bush. Approximately two-thirds of the battalion did deploy. Some soldiers formed up without weapons in a failed attempt to remain at the base for lack of proper equipment. All trainees present for formation boarded the trucks and were told that they would return to complete their training after no more than one week. The initial deployment called for a one-week offensive operation against the RUF, in

conjunction with localized attacks by the Kamajor tribal militiamen. These militiamen were initially formed as a Mende hunting society in the east and south and were joined by the Kapras of the Temne tribe.¹⁹ The Kamajors revived the “revered and ancient esoteric Mende cult of invincible and heroic hunters into a communal militia, chosen from, trained within, and responsible to the people.”²⁰ Kamajors have held an important position within Sierra Leone’s animistic tribal hierarchy for generations. This communal militia was required to protect local chiefdoms and villages from atrocities by the RUF, government forces, bandits, and other armed cults. Jealousy and mistrust ensured that the military did not hold the Kamajors in high esteem. The Kamajors were loyal to their villages, had popular support, and therefore posed a threat to the legitimacy of the corrupt and abusive Sierra Leone armed forces. The senior Kamajor regent chief Chief Sam Hinga Norman was a trusted advisor to President Kabbah. He was appointed as assistant minister of defense in 1996 and enabled the Kamajor structure to develop into a mass movement.²¹ He was openly disliked by the army because of supposed favoritism and remained isolated from their corruption and criminal efforts. Most trainees strongly believed that the Kamajors were held in higher esteem than the military, and that their national power was slowly being seconded to them. Kellie Conteh and Joy Turay, force commanders under the NRPC, were on record that their regime, a military one, did not control large sections of the army.²² President Kabbah’s civilian government potentially controlled much less. The final insult to an often unpaid and underfed army was that the Benguema trainees felt that Kamajors held a special power called Ju-ju, which made them impermeable to small arms fire and grenade fragmentation. Basic army soldiers did not have this elemental protection.

The detachment waited for the trainees to return by conducting intensive team training at the base's ranges. They also met with senior American Embassy staff including Ambassador John L. Hirsch and deputy chief of mission M. Ann Wright. Near the end of the first week the detachment was told that the trainees would be deployed for an additional week. No thought was given to canceling the detachment's mission. Tactically, they had been nominally successful and would pursue a further advance against the RUF to create a larger zone of separation between Freetown and rebel-dominated areas. The detachment also learned that some soldiers, while deployed, had looted two generators and some zinc roofing material and wanted to remain deployed another week to see what else they could acquire. This loosely organized battalion represented the only viable force of the RSLMF and continued to move towards the interior of the country. Only three trainees were killed in action during the first week of this deployment. One was a victim of friendly close air support from the military's only operational MI-24 attack helicopter. The other two were reported killed in direct action with the rebels. As the end of the second week approached, the detachment prepared to recommence training and planned to utilize the final weekend to focus on receiving the trainees. Equipment was prepared, programs of instruction again rehearsed, and training areas were reconnoitered.

The Sunday of 25 May began as a typical weekend day for the SFODA with 0600 physical training (PT) and personal hygiene. As the team prepared to eat breakfast, heavy small arms and RPG fire erupted across the compound. A coup was taking place in Freetown. Disloyal soldiers, sobels, and pure RUF rebels jointly decided to form the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council and overthrow President Kabbah. At

approximately 0400 around 300 men identified by red bandanas commandeered the ferry from Lungi airport peninsula to Freetown and quickly engaged in urban combat with Nigerian ECOMOG troops and RSLMF soldiers. Approximately four technical vehicles carrying twenty armed men in civilian clothing blew open the front gate of Freetown's maximum-security Pademba Road prison with a rocket propelled grenade launcher (RPG). They freed over 650 prisoners, including nine men previously tried for coup attempts against President Kabbah. One of these nine prisoners was Major Johnny Paul Koroma, instigator of the coup and leader of the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council.²³ He was thirty-three years old and former commander of the battalion responsible for guarding Sierra Rutile's bauxite mine in Moyamba district. Additional rebel forces were maneuvering through the Benguema area with their technical vehicles to conduct a land linkup with those rebels already in Freetown. Technical vehicles were typically four-wheel drive pickup trucks liberated from their owners by the insurgents. The trucks were then mounted with heavy machine guns or automatic grenade launchers, or simply served as mobile platforms for those weapon systems. These additional rebel forces wanted to finalize occupation of key facilities in the capital city and consolidate the takeover of the capital.

Rebel forces were able to occupy several government buildings during the opening hours of the coup. The rebel force first seized the unguarded legislature building atop a large hill in Freetown. They also occupied the national treasury building, which was immediately burned. The Bank of Sierra Leone was also burned by midday. A sharp firefight ensued around the United States Embassy, primarily due to its location on a recognizable square in the center of town, identified by the 200-year-old "bat tree."

The chancellery building was located immediately adjacent to the Nigerian mission and across a square from the National Judicial Building. Several Nigerian soldiers were killed outside the U.S. Embassy as they tried to return to a defensive position within their mission building. The U.S. Embassy building was hit by a moderate amount of small arms and RPG fire, which penetrated the masonry exterior and caused interior damage to some administrative offices. The headquarters for the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces became the center of activity for the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council. Hundreds of soldiers moved to the building's compound to offer allegiance to the new ruling body. Although the AFRC claimed that military or civilian looters would be shot on sight, looting and illegal actions against civilians began immediately. What little military discipline that had previously existed was gone. Dozens of bands of armed marauders began to roam the city to loot and conduct other illegal activities. Public and eventually private and commercial buildings were looted of valuables. Foodstuffs and alcohol were often the first items stolen and immediately put to use. Fighting continued throughout the night, as satellite groups tried to exert influence and as the AFRC extended its grip over the city.

Major Johnny Paul Koroma's first announcement proclaimed, "As custodians of state security and defenders of the constitution we have today decided to overthrow the Sierra Leone People's Party government because of their failure to consolidate the claims achieved by the brokers of peace."²⁴ He also accused the Kabbah government of being "nurtured on tribal and sectional conflict" and appealed to the international community and Nigerian government in particular to release Corporal Foday Sankoh.²⁵ A spokesman for the AFRC, Corporal Tamba Gborie, made additional statements

concerning the nature of the coup. He said that Nigerian forces were now assisting the coup leaders and stated that “We want a democracy but . . . the government has introduced tribalism.”²⁶ According to rebels involved in Freetown’s fighting, the primary resistance and fire came from Nigerians. A second reason for the coup, Gborie said, was the “poor wages soldiers receive, particularly when compared to the compensation received by the Kamajors.” He also stated that the activities of the Kamajors would be banned and that: “We are the national army, they are not, any more.” Additionally, he directed that all ministers, politician, and senior officers in the armed forces above the rank of lieutenant colonel were ordered to report to Cockherill Barracks in Freetown.²⁷ The Cockerill Barracks base in Freetown was approximately 1,500 meters from the primary U.S. residential compound atop Signal Hill. This compound included a multistory apartment building, the ambassador’s house, and a small parking area.

Fighting was not limited to the capital. Loyal soldiers who had begun to arrive back at Benguema for their assigned training with U.S. forces attempted to fight off rebel forces in small-scale localized actions. The detachment established a defensive perimeter, changed its mission focus from training to operations, and began reporting to its higher headquarters on events. Since the coup took place on a Sunday, all embassy employees except two Marine guards were split between two residential compounds. The two Marines were in the middle of shift change at the chancellery building and would remain in position until evacuated. Since rebel forces quickly shut down national fixed phone lines, the detachment assumed responsibility for all tactical communications to Europe and the United States and began immediately planning for subsequent operations.

The immediate requirement for the detachment was to establish contact with Americans at the embassy. It was imperative to receive a situation report on events in the city. Hours were dedicated to this process, which produced limited results. Team members were able to confirm with the Marine guards that a coup had taken place, and that fighting had spread throughout the city. Additionally, the guards were able to confirm that no other official embassy staff members or Americans were at the chancellery. Phone lines were not reliable and were soon cut by rebel forces. The detachment also made sporadic contact with Deputy Chief of Mission, M. Ann Wright, who was the chargé d'affaires for the duration of the mission. The political instability that led to this coup was totally unanticipated by most of the U.S. embassy staff. In fact, this event was so sudden that the ambassador had left on the Wednesday prior for a month of home leave in the United States. Only the Regional Security Officer (RSO) Mr. Jeff Breed had expressed concern to the team over the previous weeks that the government was in a very fragile position. The DCM briefly explained the situation over the phone, and hasty plans were developed to support and accommodate the staff. In conjunction with this action, the detachment made contact with its higher command, both those at SOCEUR, and its immediate company headquarters, forward-deployed in Mali for a Joint Chiefs of Staff exercise. Due to the continued fighting on the compound at Benguema, the initial guidance given to the team by its higher headquarters was to remain in the defense, and continue to report as things potentially stabilized.

Shooting and an increase in lawlessness continued into Sunday evening in Freetown. Vehicles were commandeered by the AFRC from such sources as the Sierra Leone government, United Nations offices, various religious missions, the International

Red Cross, Farming Cooperative (FARMCO), and the North Central Agricultural Project (NCAP). Vehicles were also taken from civil servants and members of parliament.

Reaction from Sierra Leone's ambassador to the United States was immediate: "This is totally surprising and totally uncalled for. There is no need for a coup in Sierra Leone today. Now Sierra Leone is going to be in a difficult condition. . . . All the aid and all the job I have been doing over here to bring economic development to Sierra Leone are now on hold until this matter is resolved. . . . These people are out to line their pockets. . . .

This is not the way to make change."²⁸ United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan echoed the prevalent surprise when he stated, "The United Nations and the international community firmly uphold the principle that the will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of governments, and that governments, democratically elected, shall not be overthrown by force. . . . The United Nations and the international community attach the greatest importance to a democratic order for Sierra Leone. . . . The United Nations continues to stand ready to assist the people of Sierra Leone in their quest for a society grounded in democracy, the rule of law, respect for human rights, and the pursuit of peace and national reconciliation." He also added following his official statements that he "strongly condemns taking into custody Sierra Leonean staff and the looting of U.N. offices, vehicles, and equipment."²⁹ No official U.S. reaction was published on the twenty-fifth of May due to the difficulty of communicating with the embassy. Also, any additional or supporting information was difficult to acquire because no news media were available to transmit information out of Sierra Leone.

On the following day the U.S. Department of State issued the following statement.

The United States condemns the coup which overthrew Sierra Leone's first democratically elected government in three decades, and calls on those claiming power in Freetown to return authority promptly to the country's elected leadership and parliament. The United States holds the Armed Forces Ruling Council (AFRC), at present in control of the security situation in the country, responsible for the safety and well-being of all American and other foreign residents.

We deplore the extensive looting of relief food as well as the property of Sierra Leonean and foreign residents. The pillage greatly reduces the availability of assistance that was being provided to the people of Sierra Leone. It will have a direct bearing on the willingness and ability of the international community to assist its citizens who are barely recovering from six years of civil war. We therefore urge an immediate end to all such acts of violence as the essential prerequisite for the resumption of international humanitarian assistance.

The morning of the twenty-sixth, the situation in Freetown worsened as ECOMOG forces readied their reaction plan. Apparently they were warned of a potential coup plan on 24 May and began preparations to reinforce their Sierra Leone contingent. Personnel and equipment were readied to arrive from Liberia into the airport, and ships were reported to be enroute. Although the AFRC ordered Lungi and Hasting Field airports closed, both remained open. ECOMOG did not recognize the legitimacy of the AFRC and the deputy ECOMOG commander, Brigadier Joe Kwateng, confirmed that the border with Liberia was closed and that "the situation in Sierra Leone is an internal matter, but our men are there going about their assigned duties."³⁰ Rebel soldiers in Freetown found and arrested five ministers from the former civilian government and continued "house-to-house" searches for others. AFRC's new spokesman, Captain Paul Thomas, urged people to return to work. They stayed home and businesses remained closed.³¹ Early indications from the SFODA and Freetown suggested that the AFRC did not have complete control or the full backing of the army. Others, including the venerable Fodah Sankoh, also remained on the fence. He was invited to return to join the

AFRC but declined by stating that “you have to watch the situation before you talk.”³²

The coup leaders were becoming more isolated.

The situation on the Benguema camp itself was calm. A portion of the detachment began a series of mounted reconnaissance missions from the base camp intended to determine the local situation. This element moved to the Liberian refugee camp in the village of Waterloo. Their purpose was to examine the nearest runway and accurately plot its position with a global positioning system (GPS). Unfortunately, refugees had moved tents and belongings onto the airfield proper, and it was unusable for military operations. The team then went to the Hastings Field airport at Waterloo to check on its condition and accurately plot its location. Hastings Field was a smaller regional airport closer to Freetown. It was built on high ground adjacent to salt marshes and the length of the runway was limited to smaller airplanes. Trans Africa Airways used Hastings as its base of operations. Most planes carried fewer than twenty passengers and flew to Guinea or Liberia. This airfield was not yet in rebel hands, and was appropriate for landing tactical aircraft. The team then moved to a small deep-water access channel from the sea and examined it for potential value to future operations. The thirty-foot-wide channel was approximately twelve feet deep and led directly to the bay. It contained a small dock facility for unloading and was also sufficient for military use. Additionally, the detachment reported on all local area beaches, routes, and potential helicopter landing zones near Benguema and Waterloo not held by rebel forces.

The detachment’s reconnaissance element also went to the sole producer of potable water for the Freetown area to coordinate for emergency resupply. He had closed his facility and barricaded himself inside to prevent looting. He agreed to supply the

SFODA and embassy staff as needed. As a backup, the team planned to draw rainwater from the cistern next to its building on Benguema and fill all available containers. That water could be filtered with small, portable hand-operated filters. Finally, the detachment's reconnaissance element traveled to the nearby ECOMOG base camp to meet with the Nigerian commander. This camp was home to an artillery battery and rifle company. This position had been occupied for several years and overlooked another Liberian refugee camp. The artillery positions were oriented toward the refugee camp. All the troops in the base camp were Nigerian and were on an extremely heightened state of alert. They stated that a coup had taken place in Freetown and that rebels had killed dozens of Nigerian soldiers. They were prepared to conduct artillery fire missions into Freetown and were currently at their highest state of alert. All of their fighting positions were manned, and all ammunition was fully distributed to individual soldiers.

Monday evening, the deputy chief of mission indirectly gave the detachment the order to move into Freetown and occupy both residential compounds. The team had been waiting for this directive from its higher headquarters and received initial word through a routine contact with the embassy staff. Nonsecure communications from the embassy staff with outside parties were terrible, and the ODA periodically called the embassy through satellite telephone to ensure the situation was calm. The DCM stated that she had personally coordinated with the commander in chief, U.S. European Command to have the team move into town and secure the residential compounds. He had given the approval and, although nearing the end of the day, she felt more secure with them in Freetown that night.

The detachment coordinated with members of the host nation military to ensure that its progress toward the capital would not be impeded or blocked. The commander of the base stated that he had no control over any of his forces, and wished the team well. Soldiers adjacent to his office stated that they had contact with rebel forces, and would attempt to ensure that the team was not attacked enroute to the capital. The ODA offered a cash reward for safe passage to the rebels, which would have been readily accepted had the team chosen to select that course of action. The team felt safer simply employing basic operational security and chose not to disclose its route to town. They would address any checkpoints or rebels appropriately as they encountered them. Members of the team completed their preparations to evacuate the compound by packing essential equipment and readying the remainder for destruction. Any organized fighting was over at Benguema and the surrounding area, and the team decided that it was appropriate to move into Freetown. The detachment had not been told over the satellite phone that both embassy compounds had been broken into the evening prior by rebel forces, and one white Chevrolet pickup truck had been stolen. The rebels stated that they would return at their convenience to take whatever else they wanted. The gate guards at the compound were contract-host-nation employees hired by Wackenhut Services and were unarmed. It was their policy not to initiate any offensive action that might provoke a response that they could not handle. Additionally, unofficial information was coming into both compounds from town that rapes and murders directed against Europeans had been reported, and there was an increased level of concern amongst family members.

Two routes were available for travel from Benguema to Freetown. The primary route followed a two-lane paved road directly into Freetown. It went past Hastings Field

and crossed the heart of the city. The second route detoured into the mountains prior to Hastings Field and turned to single lane dirt road. It entered Freetown from the southwest and led directly to the embassy residential compound on Signal Hill. Although this route passed directly in front of Military Barracks in Freetown, it was much more remote and thus safer than the primary route. The detachment selected the mountainous route and made its way into town just before dark using its HMMWV with trailer and one four-wheel-drive rental vehicle. The team encountered its first checkpoint prior to the Hastings turn-off and talked its way through without any problems. There were about thirty soldiers with various uniforms at the checkpoint huddled around a small bonfire. They were lightly armed and were primarily ensuring that no Nigerians from the artillery base attempted to reinforce units in Freetown. While traveling through the mountains, the ODA lost its four-wheel drive to a severe mechanical malfunction. All eleven ODA members had to transload themselves and their equipment onto the HMMWV and trailer. The ODA passed through a second checkpoint a mile south of Military Barracks, again without incident, and arrived at the residential compound atop Signal Hill approximately two hours after it departed from Benguema.

On arrival at Signal Hill, the team split its resources and personnel to cover both compounds, which were approximately a kilometer apart. An indirect weapon system was established at the residential compound atop Signal Hill to support the position at the lower compound, called the Smart Farm. The majority of official American citizens, including the key embassy staff, remained at the Smart Farm. Some official U.S. citizens remained atop Signal Hill in their apartments. The DCM had additionally agreed to support the housing of many local civilians who requested sanctuary from the chaos in

the city. Almost every room within both compounds held at least two people. Many of these people remained indoors on the U.S. compounds during their entire stay prior to their eventual evacuation. During the detachment's first night in Freetown, rebel forces again probed both compounds using technical vehicles with mounted machine guns. Drivers of the technicals were dissuaded from entering either residential compounds and presumably continued their looting in another area of Freetown.

Throughout the day, the Sierra Leone embassy in Washington continued to protest the actions of the AFRC. They held a forum that drew an estimated 1,000 persons in support of the civilian government. Ambassador John Leigh told the gathering, "The coup is illegal, the guys are destructionists and they must be held responsible for their actions."³³ By this point, it was reported that fighting, looting, and arson had gutted the center of Freetown and that the hundreds of criminals released from the Pademba Road prison were issued military uniforms.³⁴ Shortly after midnight Nigerian and Guinean ECOMOG reinforcements began arriving at Lungi and Hastings airports. Reaction from the international community to the coup was unanimous in its condemnation.

Organization of African Unity (OAU) Secretary General Secretary-General Salim Ahmed Salim said, "The United Nations and the international community firmly uphold the principle that the will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of governments, and that governments, democratically elected, shall not be overthrown by force. . . . It is lamentable that some soldiers who have no mandate to rule at all should decide to challenge the legitimate position of the people. It is a setback for Africa's transition to democracy. . . . This development is a loss for Africa. This development will not be welcome in Africa."³⁵ The British Foreign Office echoed U.S. concerns in its former

colony by stating, “We deplore this attempt to overthrow the elected government of Sierra Leone and strongly urge the restoration of a democratic civilian government in accordance with the Commonwealth's Harare principles. We have made clear to the military leaders in Sierra Leone our serious concern over the level of violence against both local and foreign communities.”³⁶ The French also came on line and the French Foreign Ministry Spokesman Jacques Rummelhardt stated “France deplores that a group of military officers has seized power by force. . . . France calls for the quick restoration of constitutional legality in Freetown.”³⁷

Tuesday began with the AFRC suspending the constitution and banning political parties and activity. Nigerian dictator Suni Abacha pledged to restore the Sierra Leone government as Sierra Leone's U.N. representative James Jonah confirmed that they had requested West African troops to “restore democracy.” He also stated, “We have a bunch of corporals who opened the prisons wide open and 600 people came out, criminals, and they are roaming the streets right now.”³⁸ Upon getting established in Freetown, the detachment immediately began assisting in the planning process that led to the NEO and continued to report to its higher headquarters. Electricity was still cut off in town, and kerosene was becoming dangerously scarce. From its position, the team reported on the arrival of a three frigate Nigerian task force, which docked at the Government Wharf in Freetown. Hundreds of Nigerian soldiers offloaded into town and dispersed to reinforce previously established ECOMOG positions, including Lungi airport. The common belief among the embassy staff and locals was that Nigeria was intervening to eliminate the AFRC. In a public statement, Major Johnny Paul Koroma attempted to dissuade his subordinates of the truth by stating, “The AFRC is concerned over rumors that our

brothers, the Nigerian force, are about to launch an attack. The AFRC is hereby informing the general public to know that it is a baseless rumor. The situation is under control, and all and sundry are hereby requested to go about their normal duties.”³⁹ The Nigerians continued to reinforce this delusion by officially stating the “Sierra Leone is a part of ECOWAS and so there is no need for alarm . . . and as a member we can stop by and visit member states from time to time.”⁴⁰

The most troubling event of the day was that reports began to arrive that “hundreds of fighters in ragged camouflage uniforms were seen to enter Freetown from the rural areas, asking the way to the military barracks.”⁴¹ Their arrival coincided with heavy fighting contesting one end of the runway at Lungi Airport. The RUF was in town. The Kamajors rejected the AFRC order to disband and fought at least one action with the soldiers in the eastern town of Daru. A U.N. chartered ship, the *El Salvatore*, arrived in timely fashion to evacuate non-essential U.N. personnel and their families. Also, a Sierra Leone news agency reported that according to a U.S. Defense Department Spokesman, “A United States Naval helicopter ship, the USS *Kearsarge*, with 1,200 Marines on board will arrive in Freetown in twenty-four to forty-eight hours to help with the evacuation of Americans if it becomes necessary. It (the *Kearsarge*) is planning to stop probably 20 or so miles off the shore and wait and see what happens. . . . There has been a (State Department) request for us to be available if necessary, but no request to be more than available...There are thousands of foreigners in Sierra Leone, but that the United States had not received any requests to help with their evacuation.”⁴² Additionally, U.S. State Department Spokesman John Dinger reiterated on the same day, “There are no immediate plans to evacuate the approximately 400 U.S. nationals in Sierra Leone.”⁴³ The

detachment made its first contact with the 22nd Marine Expeditionary Unit steaming north from the coast of Gabon via secure radio and reported on all recent developments.

On the 28th the RUF high command ordered its rebels to back the AFRC. Today Sankoh purportedly surfaced on SLBS (state radio) and ordered rebels to “stop all attacks and to adopt a defensive posture . . . be on the defensive. All instructions, former instructions for operations should be cancelled . . . cooperate with the military and defend Sierra Leone’s sovereignty.”⁴⁴ Due to continued fear of Nigeria, the state radio also announced in Sankoh’s name, “We ask you to work with (the army) so that peace will prevail in our beloved motherland. So I will like you all to work with them as brothers; we are no more enemies. The enemies are the politicians, not the soldiers . . . field commanders’ orders from Sankoh will now come through Major Johnny Paul Koroma, the leader of the AFRC.”⁴⁵ To add to the feeling of stability in Freetown Kamajor commander Eddie Massalay reported to the press, “We are awaiting word from President Kabbah and we will be in Freetown to help restore order and democracy.”⁴⁶ Negotiations began between the AFRC senior ambassadors and U.N. representative in Freetown. The detachment assisted with security for the U.S. DCM at the residence of the British High Commissioner for the first of these meetings. Approximately 200 Sierra Leone soldiers and rebels surrounded the compound and added to a tense situation. The meetings lasted approximately two hours and were uneventful. The detachment also reported on a Nigerian jet making low passes over the Sierra Leone army headquarters. No ordnance was delivered.

As part of the planning for a potential NEO, members of the ODA and RSO conducted reconnaissance of the planned NEO location and associated helicopter landing

zones. They met with Nigerian soldiers guarding the hotel selected as the evacuation site, and coordinated for the arrival of the helicopters. Members of the ODA also integrated this Nigerian infantry battalion into the local security plan to be executed during the evacuation. The RSO and members of the ODA then went to the Sierra Leone ministry of defense at Cockerhill Barracks to negotiate with a member of the AFRC for safe passage of Marine helicopters. The situation at this headquarters was totally chaotic. Soldiers and RUF rebels were everywhere, and the situation was totally out of control. Looted vehicles, including the U.S. embassy pickup jammed the grounds and armed, intoxicated soldiers filled most rooms and the hallways. The AFRC representative the ODA met with, Major King, assured that the Sierra Leone MI-24 HIND-D or small arms fire would not target Marine helicopters. Major King had over twenty people in his small office, including women and children, and did not seem to have little control over what they did, including interfering with his meeting. He was in fact the only pilot for the MI-24 HIND-D in country and was coerced to join the coup. Major Koroma's second official address to the nation reiterated earlier charges that the Kabbah government had "polarized the country into regional and tribal factions." He also stated that Kabbah had lost control as atrocities spread across the country and that the Kamajors were favored over the army. He added, for good measure, that teachers and civil servants were unpaid and poorly treated.⁴⁷ In response to increased Nigerian pressure to end the coup, Sankoh again reported from abroad that, "The issue is not democracy, it is peace and Security . . . democracy will come after peace and security . . . the Nigerians yesterday landed 720 troops in Freetown, reinforcing 900 who were already in the country under the Status of Forces security agreement. A military source said the Nigerians are

demanding to deploy to protect key installations, such as the radio and television stations and State House. He said the Sierra Leoneans tried to limit the disembarking Nigerians to one rifle and one magazine each, but that the Nigerians had insisted on landing with all their weapons.⁴⁸ They did disembark with everything they needed and occupied key sites, as finally agreed upon by an AFRC not in a position to negotiate.

On the 29th the AFRC moved to seize control of the country's diamond mining industry. Although London-based Branch Energy Ltd., owned by DiamondWorks Ltd. initially discounted this movement, "miners" were eventually forced to evacuate. These actions coincided with Major Koroma's insistence that "he would soon announce a new government of national unity and a schedule for elections."⁴⁹ The detachment assisted the DCM in another meeting at the British High Commissioner's Residence, this time under calmer conditions. Members of the AFRC did not show up as anticipated and therefore did not need their large RUF security element. The civil situation had so deteriorated in Freetown that a chartered Boeing 747 arrived to evacuate nearly 400 British citizens. As the plane sat loaded and ready for takeoff, a tense standoff occurred between RUF rebels and ECOMOG forces on either side of the runway. Rebels threatened to shoot down the plane if it departed. British Army Major Jopp effectively diffused the situation by negotiating and reasoning with the rebels. He coincidentally was the officer responsible for conducting the Sierra Leone officer training in conjunction with the ODAs prior mission requirements.

On the same day the forward command element (FCE) from the MEU arrived to coordinate with the embassy staff. The RSO and members of the ODA escorted them to the primary evacuation site and landing zones. Also, the RSO and detachment members

took two members of this FCE to the Sierra Leone Army headquarters. Their mission was to conduct final coordination regarding the arrival of Marine helicopters. They were again told that all helicopters could freely land to evacuate noncombatants, although they insisted that this evacuation was unnecessary. The situation at the headquarters was worse than the previous day. More RUF rebels had arrived and there was little semblance of order. There was a total breakdown of any military structure or discipline, and the U.S. members of this group were happy to get back to the residential compound. Members of the detachment returned to the evacuation for final reconnaissance and to further coordinate with the Nigerian battalion to ensure the situation had not changed. That evening, the order came from Secretary of State Madeline Albright to evacuate all U.S. and designated noncombatants from Sierra Leone.

The U.S. DoD addressed the situation in Sierra in the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense, Public Affairs news briefing. The spokesman, COL Richard M. Bridges commented that, “The [USS] *Kearsarge* has arrived off the coast of Sierra Leone. We have sent a four-person advance command element to the embassy. They are currently coordinating an evacuation that will begin tomorrow. There are 250 to 300 Americans that we anticipate we will want to come out, and we anticipate beginning the operation tomorrow and completing it tomorrow.”⁵⁰ He additionally stated that the “situation as it's been described to me is uncertain. It's not stable at all. There's sporadic gunfire. There's a good deal of doubt about who's in charge. When the State Department asked us to conduct this noncombatant evacuation order, we moved the *Kearsarge* up to the vicinity, and we're now prepared to execute that particular NEO.”⁵¹ Finally, COL Bridges was asked what the Special Forces were doing in Freetown and answered, “There

is an eleven-man Special Forces detachment from the 3rd Special Forces Group at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, that was in Sierra Leone at the time the coup went down. They were there with some British military instructors, conducting leadership skills training for the Sierra Leone military. When the coup broke out, they withdrew to the area of the embassy, and they are currently assisting, as they can, at the embassy there in Freetown.” The reported followed with, “Providing security protection, communication” and COL Bridges responded, “I don't have precisely what they're doing, but a Special Forces group like that, an eleven-man team, can do an awful lot of things. They can provide a lot of support, and it's not just security.”⁵² DoD's final news release for that day on Sierra Leone reported:

At the request of the State Department, Secretary of Defense Cohen has directed The U.S. European Command to begin conducting an ordered evacuation of American citizens and designated third country nationals from Sierra Leone tomorrow. This operation is called Nobel Obelisk. The 22nd Marine Expeditionary Unit aboard the *USS Kearsarge*, which arrived off the coast of Sierra Leone today, will conduct the evacuation. Evacuees will be flown by helicopter from Freetown to the *USS Kearsarge* for a few days and then transported to Conakry, Guinea, for follow on transportation being arranged by the State Department to their final destinations.

The 22nd MEU is home ported at Camp Lejeune, N.C. and the *USS Kearsarge* is home ported in Norfolk, VA. Sierra Leone falls within the U.S. European Command's area of responsibility.

There is an 11-man Army Special Forces team, from 3rd Special Forces Group based at Ft. Bragg, N.C., in Freetown. This team, specially trained in sub-Saharan affairs had been conducting training with the Sierra Leone Army prior to the coup and is now assisting embassy staff and the Navy-Marine team with the noncombatant evacuation operation.

The 30th began with SLBS, Sierra Leone state radio, reporting that ECOMOG “has ordered its troops to go on the offensive on the 31st, in a bid to oust the AFRC.”⁵³ This message came from United National People's Party leader John Karefa-Smart. He additionally added, “I am concerned with the possibility for the first time in the history of

our country to be invaded by an outside force.”⁵⁴ In response to these allegations supposedly received from radio intercept, Major Koroma called for an emergency meeting of the U.N. Security Council to address Sierra Leone’s concerns about ECOMOG aggression. He went as far as claim that ECOMOG’s military buildup “constitutes interference in Sierra Leone’s internal affairs, and is a contravention of the United Nations charter.”⁵⁵

Before dawn, the SFODA organized a convoy of civilian vehicles, led by their HMMWV, from the residential compounds to the evacuation site. Upon arrival at the evacuation site, situated around the Mammy Yoko hotel, the detachment occupied security positions and established a landing zone for the Marine helicopters. They conducted final coordination with every Nigerian fighting position to ensure that they understood that U.S. helicopters were enroute. The first helicopters landed with Marines to establish a perimeter immediately surrounding the hotel. Once the initial perimeter was established, the ODA moved towards Freetown to establish blocking positions along the only two avenues of approach to the evacuation site. The Mammy Yoko hotel was located on a narrow strip of beach isolated from Freetown by a long bridge on the primary side and two-mile long beachfront road on the other. The rear area was essentially protected by a wide tidal marsh. The ODA, in a split team configuration, moved to this bridge and beachfront road. Both positions were approximately one kilometer from the evacuation site in either direction. The team spent the remainder of the day turning away any armed men and identifying potential threats to the evacuation, which proceeded without incident throughout the day.

Approximately one hour into the evacuation, the RSO and two members of the ODA drove eight miles to the center of Freetown to recover the two Marine guards remaining in the chancellery building. This element made it through three checkpoints and arrived behind the embassy using a small alley. These two Marines had been in the chancellery since Sunday, and were anxious to join the evacuees. The Marines left from a small door at the rear of the building and made their way to the vehicle through a hole in the fence. The group then returned to the evacuation site and the Marines were evacuated. According to M. Ann Wright, the DCM, “When we pulled the Marines out about eight o’clock this morning, we made a decision to wait until daylight and until some people were on the street, and not to use an overwhelming and uniformed military contingent to go after them. We thought that would be a provocative way to do things, and we felt we could extract them easier with less chance for danger to them doing it in that manner.”⁵⁶ At the conclusion of the mission, the ODA collapsed its positions into the main perimeter and left Sierra Leone with the last helicopters going back to the USS *Kearsarge*.

According to a telephonic U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) news conference with COL Sam Helland, Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) commander, approximately 900 civilians were evacuated from Freetown, including 330 Americans and other civilians from over forty countries. The Marines flew approximately eight-five sorties that day.⁵⁷ At 1530 Greenwich Mean Time (GMT), the U.S. closed its embassy and withdrew all diplomatic and military personnel from the country.⁵⁸

On the first of June members of the ODA returned with elements of the MEU to evacuate 350 additional civilians. The French navy ship Jean Moulin also evacuated

approximately 250 civilians. A statement by the AFRC the night prior may have led to the increased willingness to evacuate. “The AFRC wishes the public to know that while it is aware of a possible threat to public security by likely invasion of Freetown by foreign troops tomorrow, negotiations are going on with them.”⁵⁹ Reports of ECOMOG’s upcoming operation WILD CHASE generated an elevated sense of panic in the city. Negotiations for peace continued throughout the day but led nowhere. RUF spokesman David Collins said, “The RUF has brought 5,000 fighters into Freetown in support of the revolution.” The U.S. DoS stated, “The U.S. opposes a violent solution . . . there has been enough violence in Sierra Leone, we hope democracy is quickly restored there by diplomatic means and through international pressure.”⁶⁰ Unfortunately, the violent solution began in earnest the following day.

On the 2nd of June, talks among all involved parties broke down. At 0600 a Nigerian warship began shelling the area surrounding the army headquarters. Unfortunately, the shells were long and destroyed a shanty neighborhood, killing 80 and injuring an additional 100 civilians. In response, approximately 150 soldiers and rebels attacked the Nigerians guarding the Mammy Yoko hotel evacuation site. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) brokered a cease-fire after the top two floors of the hotel caught fire. The purpose was to evacuate the remaining 600 civilians. The Nigerians were surrounded and ran low on ammunition after suffering one killed in action (KIA) and five wounded in action (WIA) and losing contact with their support base at Hastings Field. Additionally, British Major Jopp, with the Nigerians, was also slightly wounded by RPG fire. They were forced to surrender their position. Three hundred Nigerian soldiers and thirteen officers were captured and used by the rebels as

human shields in other parts of the city. Additional fighting took place throughout Freetown, and the Nigerians finally seized complete control of Lungi airport.

On the 3rd of June, the final U.S. evacuation took place from Freetown. Detachment members went ashore at Lumley Beach with a Marine task force to evacuate an additional 1,261 people from Freetown. These included twenty-one Americans, 194 British citizens, and the British and Nigerian High Commissioners and their staffs.⁶¹ The DoS stated, “We do not anticipate any further evacuation from Freetown, because we think we’ve got all the Americans out who want to come out.”⁶² The mission ended with Secretary of Defense William S. Cohen speaking at a Pentagon news briefing June 3 and commending the 22nd Marine Expeditionary Unit and the USS *Kearsarge* crew for conducting three “safe, fast and efficient” evacuations. About 450 Americans, 250 Britons and 1,800 nationals of about forty other countries left the troubled West African nation aboard U.S. military helicopters 30 May, followed by 350 on 1 June, and 1,250 on 3 June, DoD officials said.⁶³

The U.S. Department of State learned some valuable lessons from the operation in Freetown and the following year rightfully awarded two deserving individuals for their actions. “Secretary Madeleine Albright recently presented the Secretary’s Award for Heroism to two Foreign Service officers for their service in Sierra Leone during the May 1997 military takeover and subsequent U.S. military evacuation of 2,500 civilians. M. Ann Wright and Jeffrey C. Breed were recognized for risking their personal safety to protect U.S. lives and interests.”⁶⁴ During the awards ceremony, Ms. Wright made some appropriate comments based on personal observations. She recommended, “People going to missions in these areas [fifteen to twenty of the most vulnerable countries], at least

senior leaders, need to be briefed about what could happen when they go into an unstable environment, they need a more in-depth run-through of what happens during a crisis and how to conduct evacuations in case they need to do that.” She additionally mentioned some facts that a deployed SFODA could assist DoS with. She urged that, “Posts, especially the most unstable ones, should closely study and troubleshoot their emergency action plans. . . . Because during the coup d'état in Sierra Leone occurred during the weekend, the staff was physically cut off from the chancery and resorted to planning the evacuation from the housing compound. . . . That was something we never anticipated, it provided quite a challenge.”⁶⁵

U.S. forces executed another NEO in the region barely a week later. Although the operation differed from NOBEL OBELISK in some key respects, this thesis also considers Operation FIRM RESPONSE as a similar case study applicable to Special Forces actions during NEOs. The Congo democratic progress was derailed in 1997. As presidential elections scheduled for July 1997 approached, tensions between the current president Lissouba and former president Sassou camps mounted. When on 5 June, President Lissouba's government forces surrounded Sassou's compound in Brazzaville, Sassou ordered his militia to resist. Thus began a four-month conflict that destroyed or damaged most of Brazzaville.⁶⁶ FIRM RESPONSE commenced on 10 June 1997 based on initial reports from DoS that the situation in Congo had deteriorated. On 9 June the State Department spokesman stated:

Since June 5th, the situation in Brazzaville has been chaotic and violent. There has been continuing fighting between the Congolese military forces and the paramilitary forces loyal to the former president, Denis Sassou Nguesso. The situation remains quite confused as we speak. I just spoke to the head of our task force, up on the seventh floor, on Congo-Brazzaville. I can tell you that our

American embassy continues to be operating, but under quite adverse circumstances. The embassy took an RPG hit over the weekend, also some small arms fire. We don't believe that this fire was directed at the embassy; we think it was just sporadic fire and it was coincidental. We have 28 American diplomats in Congo-Brazzaville. We'd like to bring that number down to 15 American diplomats in the next day or two if we can. The problem is, we've not been able to evacuate those Americans. It's simply unsafe to do so.”⁶⁷

The U.S. European Command's response to this crisis was to send a small twelve-person Survey and Assessment Team to the city of Brazzaville, Congo on 10 June to support the embassy staff. The political situation of Congo had deteriorated as the national government faced elections. Fringe elements occupied their respective sections of Brazzaville and established combat lines of demarcation. Troops loyal to the government attempted to fight off insurgent forces supporting former president, Denis Sassou-Nguesso as well as additional militia groups supporting local warlords who were taking advantage of a chaotic situation. Unfortunately, the situation had so deteriorated by the time the USEUCOM team arrived that their plane was struck by a small amount of ground fire as they landed at the Brazzaville airport. On 5 June the French government had launched Operation PELICAN to evacuate French citizens from the Congo. Two regiments of the French Foreign Legion, the 2nd REP, and the 1st REC, controlled most of the airfield and key checkpoints between the airport and the French embassy. French forces additionally occupied a former Legion base in the outskirts of town, and a small position adjacent to the Congo River. On arrival, the team off-loaded and fifty-six civilians, including thirty Americans, boarded for immediate evacuation to Libreville, Gabon.⁶⁸

The team spent the following week working out of the U.S. Embassy located near the Congo River. The embassy building was approximately two hundred meters from the

line of demarcation between the primary rebel group and loyal government forces. French forces evacuated in excess of 7,000 civilians throughout the entire week. Rebel groups continued to clash in the city, and used heavy weapons including artillery and BM-21 rockets individually launched from their truck-mounted launchers. Also, a single tank versus single tank battle ensued at the airfield after the Cobra militia group had overrun the military's tank battalion headquarters and captured an aging T-55. An antitank gunner from the Foreign Legion attempted to destroy the rebel tank, but missed with a long-range shot from the French airfield HQ. The rebel tank succeeded in destroying the government occupied tank and roamed freely about town until it ran out of fuel within its own lines. French air traffic resumed and French C-130s laden with civilians continued to fly uninterrupted to Libreville, Gabon. The decision to evacuate the U.S. embassy was seemingly made prior to the arrival of the team. The ambassador, Mr. Aubry Hooks, quickly determined that the American embassy, located two hundred meters from the Ministry of Defense headquarters, was untenable and should be evacuated. Lengthy preparations ensued to ensure that the embassy could be safely abandoned.

On the 16th, the team moved the embassy staff and one Peace Corps volunteer to the evacuation airfield. The Peace Corps volunteer had traveled from the interior of Congo to the capital when she heard of the violence. The embassy staff then flew aboard a contract commercial plane to Kinshasa, Zaire. The team and Peace Corps volunteer departed Brazzaville airfield aboard the infiltration aircraft, which had been standing by in Libreville, Gabon. All Americans in the Brazzaville area wishing to evacuate were safely removed from a situation that had quickly degenerated into lawlessness, looting,

and extreme violence. This mission was made more difficult by the delayed decision to evacuate Congo. Obviously, the rapid pace of events on the ground had negated the requirement for an assessment team. A more concise planning process enacted by DoS would have ensured a force more appropriately tailored to execute this difficult mission.

In conclusion, Sierra Leone remains an area of international concern due to its continued turmoil and instability. The African continent is rapidly becoming more important politically, and increased influence by the European Community and the United States will enable continuation of the diplomatic process. Due to this influence, more information is becoming available on a daily basis. This thesis was not limited by the lack of proper supporting research material. Unfortunately, operational classification limited some aspects of the research. This thesis focused on unclassified aspects of the operation, and limited the scope of study to topics appropriate for open discussion.

This case study of Operation NOBEL OBELISK, along with additional information from Operation FIRM RESPONSE, attempts to assist future deploying units with appropriate preparations to effectively execute assigned missions. The role that Special Forces played in both missions is identified. Proposed changes to doctrine are recommended, to further enhance our ability to effectively conduct NEOs. The fragile nature of politics on the African continent makes it nearly impossible to predict and pinpoint locations of extreme and rapid instability. As per the National Security and Military Strategies, United States forces will continue to maintain an engagement presence on the continent to promote democracy and regional stability and to advance U.S. interests. With that in mind, it is critical that deploying units have a general idea as to their role in noncombatant evacuations, how they can prepare for them both prior to

and during deployments, and how they can successfully support the mission. Deployed SFODAs can greatly enhance the possibility of success for limited notice NEOs.

¹The White House, *A National Security Strategy for a New Century* (Washington, DC: The White House, 1999), iii.

²Ibid., 1.

³Ibid., 2.

⁴Ibid., 2.

⁵U.S. Congress, “Concurrent U.S. Congressional Resolution on Sierra Leone” [Resolution online]; available from <http://www.sierra-leone.org/documents.html#ECOWAS>; Internet; accessed on 7 January 2001.

⁶Sierra Leone Web, “International Alert, A Time of Hope and Transformation: Sierra Leone Peace Process Reports and Reflections” [Article online]; available from <http://www.sierra-leone.org/slnews2.html>; Internet; accessed on 10 March 2001.

⁷U.S. Congress, “Concurrent U.S. Congressional Resolution on Sierra Leone” [Resolution online]; available from <http://www.sierra-leone.org/documents.html#ECOWAS>; Internet; accessed on 7 January 2001.

⁸Ibrahim Abdullah and Patrick Muana, “The Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone” in Christopher Clapham, ed., *African Guerrillas* (Bloomington Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1998), 176.

⁹Ibid., 178.

¹⁰Karl P. Magyar and Earl Conteh-Morgan, ed., *Peacekeeping in Africa: ECOMOG in Liberia* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, Inc., 1998).

¹¹Sierra Leone Web, “International Alert, A Time of Hope and Transformation: Sierra Leone Peace Process Reports and Reflections” [Article online]; available from <http://www.sierra-leone.org/slnews2.html>; Internet; accessed on 10 March 2001.

¹²Magyar and Conteh-Morgan.

¹³Abdullah and Muana, 185-7.

¹⁴B. Jackson and J. Larsen, *Analytical Study on Irregular Warfare in Sierra Leone and Liberia* (Washington, DC: Foreign Systems Research Center Study for Office of Middle East, Africa and Regional Military Assessments (RAM-3), Defense Intelligence Agency, 1998).

¹⁵Paul Richards, *Fighting for the Rain Forest: War, Youth & Resources in Sierra Leone* (London: Villiers Publications, 1996).

¹⁶Sierra Leone News Archive, “Sierra Leone News Update” [New report online]; available from <http://www.sierra-leone.org/slnews2.html>; Internet; accessed on 10 March 2001.

¹⁷Wright, M. Ann, Deputy Chief of Mission, American Embassy, Sierra Leone, Freetown, Sierra Leone, personal discussion with the author, June 1997.

¹⁸Abdullah and Muana, 185-190.

¹⁹Sierra Leone News Archive, “Sierra Leone News Update” [News report online]; available from <http://www.sierra-leone.org/slnews2.html>; Internet; accessed on 10 March 2001.

²⁰Abdullah and Muana, 185-190.

²¹Ibid., 185.

²²Ibid., 184.

²³Richard Carver, “Sierra Leone From Cease-fire to Lasting Peace” [Article online]; available from <http://www.unhcr.ch/refworld/country/writenet/wrisle.htm>; Internet; accessed on 10 March 2001.

²⁴Ibid., 4.

²⁵Ibid., 5.

²⁶Ibid., 5.

²⁷Ibid., 6.

²⁸Sierra Leone News Archive, “Sierra Leone News Update” [News report online]; available from <http://www.sierra-leone.org/slnews2.html>; Internet; accessed on 10 March 2001.

²⁹Ibid., 4.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Ibid., 3.

³²Ibid., 4.

³³Ibid., 6.

³⁴Ibid., 7.

³⁵Ibid., 7.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Ibid., 8

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Ibid., 9.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Ibid., 10.

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Ibid., 11.

⁴⁸Ibid., 12.

⁴⁹Ibid., 13.

⁵⁰OASD Public Affairs, “29 May 1997 DoD News Briefing” [Press briefing online]; available from http://www.defenselink.mil/news/May1997/t052997_t0529asd; Internet; accessed on 14 December, 2000.

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³Sierra Leone Web, “Daily Press Releases” [Online press releases]; available from <http://www.sierra-leone.org/documents.html#ECOWAS>; Internet; accessed on 7 January, 2001.

⁵⁴Ibid., 15.

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶OASD Public Affairs, “30 May 1997 DoD News Briefing” [News briefing online]; available from http://www.defenselink.mil/news/May1997/t052997_t0530asd; Internet; accessed on 14 December 2000.

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸Sierra Leone News Archive, “Sierra Leone News Update” [Online news report]; available from <http://www.sierra-leone.org/slnews2.html>; Internet; accessed on 10 March 2001.

⁵⁹Ibid., 19.

⁶⁰Ibid., 18.

⁶¹Ibid., 20

⁶²Ibid.

⁶³OASD Public Affairs, “6 June 1997 DoD News Briefing” [News briefing online]; available from http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Jun1997/n06121997_9706121.html; Internet; accessed on 14 December 2000.

⁶⁴U.S. Department of State, “State Magazine” [Article online]; available from http://www.state.gov/www/publications/statemag/statemag_mar98/feature1.html; Internet; accessed on 12 February 2001.

⁶⁵Ibid.

⁶⁶U.S. Department of State, “Background Notes, Republic of Congo” [Country information online]; available from http://www.state.gov/www/background_notes/congo-ro_0002_bgn.html; Internet; accessed on 10 September 2000.

⁶⁷U.S. Department of State, “9 June 1997 Daily Press Briefing” [News briefing online]; available from <http://secretary.state.gov/www/briefings/9706/970609db.html>; Internet; accessed on 17 November 2000.

⁶⁸United States Air Force. “Air Force News online” 11 June 97 [Article online]; available from http://www.af.mil/news/Jun1997/n19970611_970692.html; Internet; accessed on 17 January 2000.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides an overview of literature and doctrinal information relevant to noncombatant evacuations. The research materials used for this thesis come primarily from three sources: Academic works, military doctrine, and the Internet. Although the crisis in Sierra Leone remains active, few books provide sufficient detail or focus specifically on the time period surrounding the 1997 coup. Therefore, Internet sources provide the most current and detailed information, either from first-hand sources or residents of Sierra Leone.

Three recent academic books provide the historical basis for this thesis. The first is *African Guerrillas: The Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone*,¹ edited by Christopher Clapham. This is comprised of ten case studies examining African insurgencies. Ibrahim Abdullah and Patrick Muana write the chapter on the Revolutionary United Front's negative impact on Sierra Leone. Their focus is on the overwhelming numbers of lumpenproletariat who have been drawn to the RUF by the depressed social and economic conditions of the country. This essay is well researched and written and provides a concise account of the RUF. The second book is *Fighting for the Rain Forest: War Youth & Resources in Sierra Leone*, by Paul Richards.² This academic work traces the root causes of conflict in Sierra Leone. It is the most complete recent work of the turmoil in Sierra Leone from 1991 to 1998. It is exceptionally detailed and was most useful in providing a complete picture of the situation that led to the 1997 coup. The third book is *Peacekeeping in Africa: ECOMOG in Liberia*, by Karl P.

Magyar and Earl Conteh-Morgan.³ This work addresses the impact of Liberian insurgency on Sierra Leone. It provides detail on the founding and support of the RUF and on ECOMOG operations in both Sierra Leone and Nigeria. A fourth academic source used for this thesis is *Analytical Study of Irregular Warfare in Sierra Leone and Liberia*, by Bruce Jackson and Dr. Jeffrey A. Larsen from Foreign Systems Research Center.⁴ This study was done under contract for the Office of Middle East, Africa and Regional Military Assessments in Defense Intelligence Agency. It is extremely detailed and provides a great overview of the insurgencies in both countries.

The second category of reference materials used is U.S. policy and military doctrine. The initial documents used concern U.S. policy at the national level. They are *A National Security Strategy for a New Century*,⁵ and *United States National Military Strategy: Shape, Respond, Prepare Now-A Military Strategy for a New Era*.⁶ Both works address national responsibilities with regard to the use of U.S. forces overseas, and their potential roles and missions. They have not been updated since the new administration has taken office.

All applicable joint publications and Army doctrinal manuals that address complex contingency and noncombatant evacuation were applied to this thesis. The primary reference used is Joint Publication 3-07.5, *Joint Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures for Noncombatant Evacuation Operations*, published 30 September 1997.⁷ The lead agency for this publication is the U.S. Marine Corps. The Joint Staff doctrine sponsor for this publication is the J-3, Joint Staff. This publication remains current and is not currently under consideration for revision. This publication essentially details responsibilities and requirements for the successful conduct of NEOs. The primary focus

of this publication is intended for a joint task force tasked to conduct a typical large-scale NEO. This publication covers in adequate detail the fundamental planning and execution requirements for a NEO. It additionally specifies adequate integration and coordination of military and Department of State assets during the execution phase of the mission.

This publication served as the primary background and doctrinal reference for the thesis and is discussed at greater length in Chapter Four. Although not published until after NOBEL OBELISK occurred, this manual reflects the joint doctrine as it was understood at the time of mission execution. This manual remains current, relevant, and is the best doctrinal basis for NEOs.

The second primary reference used was Department of the Army Field Manual 90-29, *Noncombatant Evacuation Operations*, dated 17 October 1994.⁸ The proponent for this publication is the U.S. Army Combined Arms Center at Fort Leavenworth. This publication remains current and is not under review for revision. Similar to Joint Publication 3-07.5, this manual covers the planning and execution requirements for the conduct of NEOs. All terminology is similar to the Joint Publication, and large-scale tactics, techniques, and procedures remain essentially similar. Unfortunately, this manual focuses on NEOs from an exclusively Army perspective and does not do a thorough job detailing the joint requirements of these operations. It served as a valid reference tool for the thesis to understand the mind-set and mission requirements of an army unit tasked as the lead agency for a JTF.

Another reference used is Department of the Army Field Manual 31-20, *Doctrine for Special Forces Operations (Initial Draft)*, dated December 1998.⁹ The proponent for this manual is the United States Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and

School. This manual has no useful NEO specific information, but covers in detail the doctrinal duties and responsibilities of Special Forces.

Another reference used is Department of the Army Field Manual 100-25, *Doctrine for Army Special Operations Forces, dated 1 August 1999*.¹⁰ Again, this manual details the overall doctrine for SOF, but does not specifically address the interface with NEO planning and execution.

Joint Publication 3-05, Doctrine for Joint Special Operations, dated 17 April 1998 was also used.¹¹ The lead agent for this publication is the United States Special Operations Command. The Joint Staff doctrine sponsor for this publication is the Director for Operations (J-3). This publication provides an overview of joint special operations and does not cover in detail any NEO related information.

Additional information was found in 12FAH-1, *Emergency Planning Handbook*, 22 January 1992, developed by the U.S. Department of State.¹² This is a very useful document for research. It provides the information from the DoS perspective that complements that found in our current doctrine. Although not recently updated, it is the document currently used by overseas staffs to prepare for and execute NEOs. Additionally, the Family Liaison Office of the Department of State has published a *Direct Communication Project, Paper #10, Evacuation Plan*, which is intended for use by family members of officials serving overseas.¹³ This document is useful to those who have the potential of being evacuated. In conjunction with the Emergency Planning Handbook, these two documents provide the majority of salient information for DoS employees serving overseas.

The *Department of Defense Directive Number 3025.14*, dated 5 November 1990 and updated 13 July 1992, is a directive that “Updates policies, responsibilities, and procedures for the protection and evacuation of U.S. citizens and designated aliens in danger areas abroad, and assigns responsibilities for noncombatant evacuation operations (NEO) planning and implementation.”¹⁴ This is a formal document that sheds a limited amount of light on regulatory and agency responsibility for NEOs. Its focus is on the agency-level requirements determination for the conduct of noncombatant evacuations.

Another work of value to this thesis is *Operation Assured Response: SOCEUR’s NEO in Liberia, April 1996*, written by Dr. John W. Partin and Captain Rob Rhoden from the United States Special Operations Command History and Research Office.¹⁵ This study covers a similar evacuation from western Africa, which involved a large-scale joint evacuation of personnel from a non-permissive environment. A few similarities were gleaned from this report that were of value to the continued research required for this thesis.

Additional resources researched for this thesis are three earlier theses produced by the Center for Naval Analyses and the Master of Military Art and Science program. The first is *Responses to Harm’s Way and Humanitarian Situations by Naval Forces, 1990-1996*, by Stephen J. Guerra, and provides background information on the conduct of DOS personnel during numerous evacuations.¹⁶ The second is *Eastern Exit: The Noncombatant Evacuation Operation (NEO) From Mogadishu, Somalia, in January 1991*, by Adam B. Siegel, and provides insight into the planning and execution phase of a NEO.¹⁷ It also provides insight from the DoS perspective into any identified deficiencies that detracted from the conduct of the mission. The last is *The Role of Special Forces in*

Information Operations, by Major Fred Gottschalk, and provides some limited insight into Operation NOBEL OBELISK and the benefits of the involvement of U.S. Army Special Forces.¹⁸

U.S. forces routinely execute short-notice complex noncombatant evacuations. Appropriate military doctrine, specifically joint in nature, has been developed to plan for and conduct noncombatant evacuations. The primary extent of this information was identified and considered for use in this thesis. Additional assets considered, and if applicable used, were the personal interviews of soldiers and Marines who participated in the operation, Department of State employees who served in leadership positions or were evacuated during the operation, the U.S. Army John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School's Directorate of Training and Doctrine, and all associated unclassified after action reports and lessons learned from the 22nd Marine Expeditionary Unit and the 3rd Special Forces Group (Airborne). Excerpts from the 22nd MEU were collected in conjunction with an above-mentioned Master of Military Art and Science thesis. The complete after action review from the 3rd Special Forces Group is not available. Personal notes and observations from the detachment commander served as the primary basis for the background information necessitated by this thesis.

The final category of research materials used in this thesis was sources of information from the Internet. DefenseLINK News, from the U.S. DoD, archives all press briefings that made reference to the operations in Sierra Leone and Congo. Also, the daily press briefings from U.S. DoS and the online version of *State Magazine* also include solid references on Sierra Leone and Congo, including post-mission awards ceremonies for the Sierra Leone DCM and RSO. The Sierra Leone Web contains

extensive information concerning Sierra Leone, including dozens of applicable official international statements and documents.¹⁹ Additionally, the archive section of Sierra Leone news contains the most detailed account of what took place between May and June of 1997.²⁰ The majority of this information was clandestinely compiled by prodemocracy Sierra Leone Radio 98.1. Refworld's Writenet, available through a UNHCR link contained two excellent essays written by Richard Carver: "Sierra Leone, From Cease Fire to Lasting Peace,"²¹ and "After the ECOMOG Intervention: Update February 1997 to April 1998."²² Writenet also posted Tom Kamara's 1999 detailed essay entitled "Sierra Leone: A Search for Peace Against the Odds."²³ Additionally, a countless amount of appropriate information including news links and official web sites were researched through the available links from the Sierra Leone web. Another useful site for information was the INCORE²⁴ web site. Again, this site provides numerous essays, articles, and links to dozens of sites providing current information of Sierra Leone. Two key links from this site are Africa News Online²⁵ and the UNHCR²⁶ link. Both sites contain valid information from numerous perspectives. Another quality news source of information was the British Broadcasting Company (BBC).²⁷ The U.K. remains actively involved in Sierra Leone and the BBC continues to effectively report on most developments. Air Force News online provided some information on the flight into Brazzaville, Congo, since the aircrew won the U. S. Air Force's meritorious flight of the year award for 1997. The Daily Mail and Guardian also had close to 100 local news stories covering events in Sierra Leone.²⁸ Finally, several NEO accounts and relevant personal information were found on the U.S. DoS *State Magazine*²⁹ web site and

Realworld Rescue.³⁰ Both contain personal NEO accounts and recommended tactics, techniques, and procedures.

A great deal of scholarly research has been dedicated to the difficulties in West Africa, particularly in Sierra Leone and neighboring Liberia. These works enabled the researcher to further examine why internal and external factors caused the 1997 turbulence in Sierra Leone. This research also illustrates the reasons why a U.S. military unit found itself in such an unstable country. The large body of recent works may enable future deployed units to more effectively plan how NEO operations will be conducted. Additionally, a careful study of available information, coupled with appropriate analysis from this operation in particular, may enable units to more decisively conduct large-scale emergency noncombatant evacuation planning and execution in a safe and focused manner. By determining what went well and what did not go so well, or was learned through execution, this thesis may enable the process of pre-deployment NEO planning to be dedicated and streamlined. This thesis takes a unit from a review of doctrine to the violent reality of insurgency warfare in a short period of time.

The review of all available literature applicable to this region is necessary to ensure a thought process that incorporates all elements of cultural and military awareness. This greater understanding is required to understand the complexities of this region. Historical examples, although often ignored, provide valuable insight to applicable doctrine, first hand accounts of what did and did not go well, and future recommendations to enhance the potential of future NEO successes. Special Forces are ideally suited, by the simple fact that they may already be in country, to contribute to the

success of NEOs. The historical background and cultural understanding required for this thesis are also required for every SFODA prior to deploying overseas.

¹Ibrahim Abdullah and Patrick Muana, “The Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone” in Christopher Clapham, ed., *African Guerrillas* (Bloomington Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1998).

²Paul Richards, *Fighting for the Rain Forest: War, Youth & Resources in Sierra Leone* (London: Villiers Publications, 1996).

³Karl P. Magyar and Earl Conteh-Morgan, *Peacekeeping in Africa: ECOMOG in Liberia* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, Inc., 1998).

⁴B. Jackson and J. Larsen, *Analytical Study on Irregular Warfare in Sierra Leone and Liberia* (Washington, DC: Foreign Systems Research Center Study for Office of Middle East, Africa and Regional Military Assessments (RAM-3), Defense Intelligence Agency, 1998).

⁵The White House, *A National Security Strategy for a New Century* (Washington, DC: The White House, 1999).

⁶U.S., Joint Chiefs of Staff, *United States National Military Strategy: Shape, Respond, Prepare Now-A Military Strategy for a New Era* (Washington: The Joint Staff): Excerpt reprinted in U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, *National Military Strategy* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: USACGSC, August 2000).

⁷U.S., Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Pub 3-07.5, *Joint Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures for Noncombatant Evacuation Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, September 1997).

⁸U.S., Department of the Army, Field Manual 90-29, *Noncombatant Evacuation Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, October 1994).

⁹U.S., Department of the Army, Field Manual 31-20, *Doctrine for Special Forces Operations (Initial Draft)* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, December 1998).

¹⁰U.S., Department of the Army, Field Manual 100-25, *Doctrine for Army Special Operations Forces* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, August 1999).

¹¹U.S., Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Pub 3-05, *Doctrine for Joint Special Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, August 1993).

¹²U.S., Department of State, 12FAH-1, *Emergency Planning Handbook*, (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, January 1992).

¹³U.S., Department of State, Family Liaison Office, *Direct Communication Project, Paper #10, Evacuation Plan*, [Paper online]; available from <http://www.state.gov/www/flo/paper10.html>; Internet; accessed on 19 March 2001.

¹⁴U.S., Department of Defense, Directive 3025.14, *Protection and Evacuation of U.S. Citizens and Designated Aliens in Danger Areas Abroad* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, November 1993).

¹⁵Dr. John Partin and CPT Rob Rhoden, *Operation Assured Response: SOCEUR's NEO in Liberia, April 1996* (Tampa, Florida: United States Special Operations Command, 1996).

¹⁶Stephen J. Guerra, *Responses to Harm's Way and Humanitarian Situations by Naval Forces, 1990-1996* (Newport, Rhode Island: Center for Naval Analyses, 1997).

¹⁷Adam B. Siegel, *Eastern Exit: The Noncombatant Evacuation Operation (NEO) From Mogadishu, Somalia, in January 1991* (Newport, Rhode Island: Center for Naval Analyses, 1994).

¹⁸Frederick L. Gottschalk, "The Role of Special Forces in Information Operations" (Master of Military Art and Science Thesis, Fort Leavenworth, KS: USACGSC, May 2000), 71.

¹⁹Sierra Leone Web [Website online]; available from <http://www.sierra-leone.org/>; Internet; accessed on 10 March 2001.

²⁰Sierra Leone News Archive, "Sierra Leone News Update" [News update online]; available from <http://www.sierra-leone.org/slnews2.html>; Internet; accessed on 10 March 2001.

²¹Richard Carver, "Sierra Leone From Cease-fire to Lasting Peace" [Article online]; available from <http://www.unhcr.ch/refworld/country/writenet/wrisle.htm>; Internet; accessed on 11 March 2001.

²²Richard Carver, "After the ECOMOG Intervention: Update, February 1997 to April 1998" [Article online]; available from <http://www.unhcr.ch/refworld/country/writenet/wrisle.htm>; Internet; accessed on 11 March 2001.

²³Tom Kamara, "Sierra Leone: A Search for Peace Against the Odds" [Article online]; available from http://www.unhcr.ch/refworld/country/writenet/wn21_99.htm; Internet; accessed on 11 March 2001.

²⁴Incore, "Sierra Leone" [Article online]; available from <http://www.incore.ulst.ac.uk/cds/countries/sierraleone.html>; Internet; accessed on 11 March 2001.

²⁵Africa News Online [News website online]; available from http://www.africanews.org/west_sierraleone/odu; Internet; accessed on 10 March 2001.

²⁶United Nations Humanitarian Civilian Relief [Website online]; available from <http://www.unhcr.ch/>; Internet; accessed on 25 February 2001.

²⁷British Broadcasting News [Website online]; available from http://news.bbc.co.uk.hi/english/in_depth/Africa/2000sierra_leone/default.stm; Internet; accessed on 10 March 2001.

²⁸Daily Mail and Guardian [Website online]; available from http://www.mg.co.za/mg_arica_archive/sierraleone_archive.html; Internet; accessed on 26 March 2001.

²⁹U.S. Department of State, “State Magazine” [Magazine online]; available from http://www.state.gov/www/publications/statemag/statemag_sep98/featxt1.html; Internet; accessed on 26 March 2001.

³⁰Realworld Rescue, “Rescue Stories” [Article online]; available from <http://www.realworldrescue.com/neo1.htm>; Internet; accessed on 25 March 2001.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN

This thesis was researched in three phases. The first phase involved research of available academic works, journalism and government publications covering the history of conflict and current situation in Sierra Leone. This information provided a basic outline for the foundation of the thesis. It also demonstrates the challenges of operations to protect United States citizens in remote areas. It is important to understand operating conditions in Sierra Leone and the elements of the insurgency prior to the insertion of U.S. forces. This research framed the setting for the 1997 coup and subsequent evacuation and attempted to develop a pattern to illustrate why the RSLMF and RUF acted as they did. The political and social conditions in Sierra Leone shed some insight upon the complexities of its society and causes of the coup. The first phase of research involved the acquisition of as much general academic information on Sierra Leone and Liberia as possible. The historical conduct of host nation forces, both organized and unorganized, is critical in predicting how they will react to a U.S. led NEO.

The impact of a chaotic civilian population was also examined during the first phase. This includes how the inherent size, diversity, and anxiety of large civilian crowds complicated the operation at the evacuation site. Also worth examining were how the civilian population was informed of the NEO, how they reacted, and how they potentially either assisted or detracted from the possibility of mission success. Phase one also explored the Department of State implications associated with a noncombatant evacuation. The timing of the decision to evacuate an embassy is critical with regards to

the implications on military planning. The ultimate decision to close the Freetown embassy was also examined, strictly from the military perspective. In a post-mission interview DCM M. Ann Wright commented on the military requirements associated with her desire to maintain U.S. diplomatic presence in Sierra Leone. She added that it simply was not worth the effort for so many troops to secure relatively few official U.S. citizens responsible for communicating with an illegitimate government. In Brazzaville, the decision to evacuate was made too late from a military perspective. Therefore, the evacuation was conducted in a semipermissive environment with French assistance.

The second phase of the research was conducted with a focus on the operation itself. It involved gathering mission specific details on how the SFODA operated prior to the arrival of conventional forces. It then focused on how the detachment contributed to the success of the mission in conjunction with conventional forces. This phase of the research detailed how the parameters of the mission grew, supported by the capabilities of an SFODA, and beyond what had been initially foreseen. This phase was initially intended to require more personal contact through U.S. military channels with individuals present in the planning phase, as well as during the execution phase of the noncombatant evacuation.

Reference material was not limited to U.S. Army publications or statements, but included any available non-classified information from the Marine Corps and U.S. Department of State. Examined information included mission type documents and unclassified post mission reports. This information was analyzed to focus on how each aspect of the plan evolved, including what could have been done better, and what remains applicable to current operations. This thesis did not determine that there evolved a

concrete connection with how the operation was conducted, and the current crisis faced by the residents of a still-divided nation. Therefore, no appropriate lessons learned could be applied to future missions of this type. NEOs are short-duration operations used as a last resort, and therefore generated few long-term ramifications for the situation in a host-nation. Since the majority of mission specific information relevant to the research question was examined during this phase, it became necessary to maintain parallel focus on how this operation could better be executed in the future.

The third phase of the research involved the study of doctrine, both joint and Army, to focus the prior two phases of research. From a doctrinal perspective, this phase address the definitions and requirements of this operation, and how it can be relative or potentially contrary to the cohesive application of appropriate doctrine. This phase attempted to unite the distinctions between how the training mission began and evolved into a NEO. It also attempted to apply this relationship to future operations with regards to what was effective, what should be expanded, and what was and remains irrelevant. The research focused on the mission characteristics that determine how Special Forces can be successfully employed in similar operational situations. Future or exploratory expansions of roles and missions were addressed according to how they would retroactively have impacted on the execution of Operation NOBEL OBELISK. The focus of this thesis remained on Special Forces and the operational requirements which a detachment or company could expect to face during a similar mission.

Time was allocated following the completion of the third phase to continue to research current Internet information, as it became available. The important initial focus remained to gather appropriate sources and concrete information, and to establish a

thought basis chronologically prior to determining the structure of the thesis. Assets from the second and third phases, once identified, were contacted during the first phase to provide appropriate response time to questions and requests for information and assistance. The research design for this thesis was appropriate to successfully complete the project. The primary difficulty in this type of research is the availability of academic works, and frequency with which new information appears on the Internet.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS

This chapter analyzes lessons relevant to a Special Forces detachment assisting in Noncombatant Evacuation Operations. The majority of this analysis derives from Operation NOBEL OBELISK, conducted by an organic Special Forces operational detachment. Additional information is included from Operation FIRM RESPONSE. The operational element of FIRM RESPONSE was a joint team of special operations personnel organized in a detachment-sized force. The analysis addresses: doctrine, command/support relationships between military and Department of State personnel, communications, planning, and relevance to the success of the mission. This analysis illustrates potential key points, which, if adequately addressed and considered, will increase the probability of future mission success.

The draft Army Field Manual 3-0, issued as a student text at the Army Command and General Staff Officer Course, defines noncombatant evacuations in clear terms. “NEOs supported by the military are normally initiated when the local situation has deteriorated, and the security of the evacuees is uncertain or the environment is hostile.”¹ It further illustrates the conditions under which NEOs may be conducted, and generally defines the primary threats as “hostile forces, general lawlessness, dangerous environmental conditions, or a combination of all three.”² The definition concludes with a salient consideration: “Correctly appraising the threat and the political-military environment in which forces operate is key to NEO planning.”³

Although noncombatant evacuation operations are justifiably not considered one of the doctrinal collateral activities for SOF, their inherent operational skills and regional access may necessitate direct involvement, as it did in the case of Operation NOBEL OBELISK. Two doctrinal manuals relevant to the SF operational detachment mention this role only briefly, if at all. These are FM 100-25, *Doctrine for Army Special Operations Forces*, and FM 31-20, *Doctrine for Army Special Forces Operations*.

In Field Manual 100-25, *Doctrine for Army Special Operations Forces*, the only reference to noncombatant evacuation is found in paragraph 4-36 which states, “JTF headquarters may be established for a short-duration mission, such as a contingency operation (for example, noncombatant evacuation [NEO])”⁴ Field Manual 31-20, *Doctrine for Army Special Forces Operations*, does not mention noncombatant evacuation. Nor does Joint Publication 3-05, *Doctrine for Joint Special Operations*, mention noncombatant evacuation operations.

Joint NEO doctrine is found in Joint Publication 3-07.5, *Joint Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures for Noncombatant Evacuation Operations*, dated 30 September 1997. The target audience for this manual is the organization doctrinally recommended and most likely to execute a NEO, the joint task force. Although a single service or service department may be tasked to conduct a NEO, a joint task force (JTF) may also be formed to conduct a NEO.⁵ SOF operational units should become familiar with this manual. Each chapter contains information relevant to a Special Forces detachment involved in NEO planning or execution.

The first chapter provides a general overview of doctrinal terminology and the interaction between the Departments of Defense and State. The first document

mentioned provides overall guidance on U.S. policy towards NEOs. Pursuant to Executive Order 12656, the DoS is responsible for the protection or evacuation of U.S. citizens and nationals abroad and for safeguarding their overseas property abroad.⁶ This executive order further directs the Secretary of Defense to advise and assist the Secretary of State in preparing and implementing plans for the protection, evacuation, and repatriation of U.S. citizens.⁷ This further guidance provides the initial impetus through which any deployed SFODA, through U.S. policy directives, can find itself involved in NEOs.

Based on Executive Order 12656, DoS and DoD developed a policy memorandum of understanding entitled, “The Memorandum of Understanding Between Departments of State and Defense on the Protection and Evacuation of U.S. Citizens and Designated Aliens Abroad,” dated 29 September 1994. Joint Publication 3-07.5 clearly establishes a summary of the objectives of this MOU towards U.S. citizens and designated aliens as the following: Provide for their protection, evacuation to and welfare in a safe area, reduce to a minimum the number subject to risk of death and/or seizure as hostages, and reduce to a minimum the number in probable or actual combat areas.⁸

Department of Defense then further developed this guidance in “DODD 3025.14, Protection and Evacuation of U.S. Citizens and Designated Aliens in Danger Areas Abroad.” This directive assigns the responsibility to plan and conduct NEOs in support of the DOS to the geographic combatant commanders.⁹ The key points of this document ensure that actual military assistance is only provided following the official request of the Secretary of State. Also critical here is the Ambassador is not in the military chain of

command, but as the senior U.S. official on scene is responsible for the NEO.¹⁰ During operations in Sierra Leone the Chargé requested that the ODA travel from the Benguema Training Centre to Freetown. Ms. M. Ann Wright discussed this option on the first day of the coup, and again emphatically the following morning. Rebels had broken into both U.S. residential compounds on the previous night, threatened the guards, and stole a truck. They promised a return visit the following night. The ODA decided, due to continuous small arms fire, that the situation surrounding the base was not yet stable enough for movement. Additionally, there were several rebel held checkpoints between Benguema and Freetown. Once the situation became more stable, the ODA commander decided that a move to Freetown was appropriate. This move could not be executed until approved by the Commander of Special Operations Command, Europe. Military operations, such as this tactical movement through the mountains into the city, were exclusively directed by the military chain of command. The requests of the U.S. mission in the conduct of the operation were considered and supported as soon as appropriate operational planning and rehearsals were conducted.

Chapter one of Joint Publication 3-07.5 further identifies force options to execute a NEO, sequencing of those forces, and the use of multi-national forces to assist in the NEO. Of note is that use of multinational forces must be approved by the NCA prior to execution, although offers of voluntary service from other countries may be accepted prior to NCA approval.¹¹ Both operations demonstrated the validity of these principles. The Department of State controlled the NEO operation, while DoD provided support as directed.

Multinational forces assisted in the execution of both missions. In Sierra Leone, the SFODA integrated a Nigerian infantry battalion stationed adjacent to the evacuation site into the defensive plan. The Nigerians assisted in preventing a large crowd from entering the LZs or processing area. They augmented the conventional firepower of the Marine rifle company at the evacuation site. Loyal RSLMF soldiers were also employed to the benefit of the operation. The ODA advised all who attempted to enter the evacuation area that they would not be allowed to enter armed. They surrendered their weapons, and assisted in getting this message to other armed elements within Freetown. The evacuation area remained a weapons free zone. In Congo, French forces from the 1st Regiment Etrangere de Cavalrie (Foreign Legion) assisted in convoy security for the U.S. element with their VAB wheeled armored vehicles. SF language skills enabled this close coordination and mission support to take place.

The first key point in chapter one relevant to the SFODA is that the Department of State can call upon DoD forces for support at any time. When deployed to a remote area as the only U.S. military presence, evaluate the potential for NEO and plan accordingly. Clearly understand current chain of command and consider how a change in operational control may impact on the team. At a minimum, discuss relevant issues with the embassy staff including the embassy emergency action plan and the possible role of the SFODA. The second key point is to consider the importance of using multi-national forces to assist in NEO operations.

Chapter two of Joint Publication 3-07.5 is entitled “U.S. Organizations and Foreign Agencies: Their Roles, Coordination, and Interaction.”¹² This chapter primarily addresses the country team, U.S. military commands, and additional NGOs and PVOs.

The NGOs and PVOs addressed are those specifically identified in Joint Publication 3-08. Of note here is that Joint Publication 3-07.5 addresses CINCSOC as a member of the Washington Liaison Group (WLG), and assigns him special responsibilities. The WLG is chaired by DOS and is responsible to ensure the coordination of planning and implementation of plans of the DOS and the combatant commanders for the protection or evacuation of noncombatants abroad.¹³ CINCSOC is responsible to coordinate with the DOS, geographic CINCs, and the Services to ensure the adequacy and timeliness of special operations planning and coordination in support of NEOs.¹⁴ This timely support reaches deployed assets through the theater special operations commanders.

Deployed Special Forces units understand the function and structure of embassy staffs. An overall understanding of NGOs and PVOs working within a particular country greatly enhance the probability of smooth NEO execution. In Sierra Leone, two NGOs remained. One operated a food distribution program in support of U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and the other was Doctors Without Borders. The director of the food distribution organization was extremely knowledgeable about current conditions throughout the operational area and became a great asset to U.S. forces. NGOs and PVOs are especially useful in actual confirmation and status of addresses assigned to the embassy warden list. They generally have the latest knowledge of U.S. citizen locations at the critical time and can assist in locating lost personnel. Additionally, they often have functional communication nets that can be utilized in emergency situations.

In Brazzaville, one Peace Corps volunteer remained at a remote location upcountry. Fortunately, the country's Peace Corps director remained at the embassy and

was able to negotiate for her release from rebels through local contacts, and his own concerted efforts. His presence resolved a conflict that may have required military intervention.

The key points in chapter two relevant to the SFODA are: (1) understand the functions of the embassy and staff and (2) understand the relationships of in-country interagency personnel to a potential NEO and how they can assist with the operation. These include personnel from the U.S. government, allied governments, NGOs, PVOs, and international agencies.

Chapter three of Joint Publication 3-07.5 addresses command and control. The primary theme of this chapter is to clarify the relationship between DOS and DOD personnel involved in a NEO. The key points of this chapter are that the Ambassador is always the responsible authority for the operation.¹⁵ Keeping that fact in mind at all times, responsibility for the conduct of military operations in support of an evacuation and security of personnel, equipment, and installations within the joint operational area is vested with the joint force commander.¹⁶ This issue arose during NOBEL OBELISK over the ability to move the detachment from Benguema to Freetown. It also arose in FIRM RESPONSE concerning a request from the Ambassador to retrieve personal effects from his house. The military commander must exercise his judgment and decide upon appropriate action. Until the joint task force arrives, the operational detachment commander may be the senior U.S. military person in country and may find himself in a critical planning role within the embassy staff.

Another relevant point addressed in this chapter involves the legal status of U.S. citizens residing abroad. The Ambassador, with the approval of the Under Secretary of

State for Management, can order the evacuation of USG personnel and dependents other than uniformed personnel of the U.S. Armed Forces and designated emergency-essential DOD civilians who are not under the authority of the U.S. Chief of Mission.¹⁷ This point is rather clear and understandable. What may become less clear from an operational perspective is that, while the Ambassador cannot order the departure of private U.S. citizens and designated aliens, the Ambassador can offer them USG evacuation assistance.¹⁸ It is certainly understood that all U.S. citizens will be evacuated. In Brazzaville, a small number of U.S. citizens elected not to be evacuated when first contacted. One gentleman stated, “I have been here for over twenty years, and this type of violence always subsides.”¹⁹ Within three days he had changed his mind and plans had to be amended to recover him from an area which potentially was no longer safe. It is important to stress the criticality of the mission or danger of the situation, while remaining flexible to change and continuously reminding U.S. citizens that they can decide to be evacuated up to the departure of U.S. forces. It must be made clear that U.S. citizens will be supported until the last possible minute, either in their decisions to remain or evacuate. The military planner must constantly bear in mind the magnitude of commitment required to leave a lifetime of possessions, often including pets and friends, to be removed from a situation that potentially will not degrade to an untenable level.

The first key point in chapter three relevant to the SFODA is that the Ambassador is in charge of the evacuation. The JTF commander is in charge of all military aspects of that operation. During the critical planning phase before the arrival of a JTF, the detachment commander, who might only be in country for a short-duration training mission, might have to fill in if so directed by the military chain of command.

The second key point is that some civilians will not want to leave, or may change their minds at the most inopportune time. Remain flexible and build time for additional contingencies into your planning.

Chapter four of Joint Publication 3-07.5 addresses contingency and predeployment planning considerations. The most critical aspect of this chapter is the emergency action plan. U.S. Embassies and consulates are required to have EAPs for the area under their cognizance. The Ambassador is responsible for the preparation and maintenance of EAPs, one section of which addresses the military evacuation of U.S. citizens and designated foreign nationals. The geographic combatant commander is responsible for reviewing and commenting on EAPs.²⁰ The EAP is the primary reference document that “supports the formulation of an operation plan.”²¹ This operational plan is a tool for the embassy to execute emergency actions. The primary tool used in developing a functional EAP is the Department of State Emergency Planning Handbook (EPH) 12-FAH-1. Every Foreign Service post is required to have an operative EPH designed to provide procedures to deal with foreseeable contingencies.²² The regional security officer (RSO) usually develops these plans. Within the EPH, and critical to the military planner, is the two-page Military Implementation Checklist. A sample checklist is incorporated into Joint Publication 3-07.5 as Appendix E. This is the foundation for building the EAP, and the critical tool for the detachment to remain aware of, and integrated into. Unfortunately, these EAPs are sometimes out of date, unrealistic, and never exercised. The ODA should be aware of the basic facts of the plan, and evaluate them for applicability. For example, twenty-foot tall palm trees covered the EAP

helicopter landing zone in Brazzaville. Additionally, the emergency MREs in the embassy building were no longer edible.

Detachment members should be aware of what a good EAP looks like, and how to go about filling the gaps in an unworkable one. A well-developed EAP should incorporate a number of informational categories relevant to an evacuation. These include the basic checklist, assembly area, helicopter landing zone, airfield survey, and seaport survey; they are all initially addressed in the joint publication. The EAP must have multiple threat courses of action, to include how the threat will react to the news of a NEO or increased U.S. military presence. In Sierra Leone, the RSO and SFODA coordinated for arrival of USMC helicopters with members of the Junta. This was done at the former RSLMF headquarters and was necessary to negate the air defense threat against Marine helicopters. That threat came primarily from small arms, RPG, and the HIND-D helicopter. Threat courses of action were identified, confirmed by members of the team, and addressed as they arose. Potential evacuation sites must be clearly identified using common sense. Identify valid ports, airfields, landing zones, beaches, and structures that can serve as an appropriate evacuation site. The embassy staff will often have the appropriate location in mind. Confirm it with your own evaluation and share your information with the staff. Subsequently, develop additional locations to serve as alternate, contingency, and emergency sites. In Brazzaville, the evacuation site was dictated by what portion of the airfield the French could control. Contingency plans should include assembly areas, routes, and vehicle plans. The EAP must clearly address anticipated number of evacuees, by area and exact location. In Sierra Leone, there were 178 official U.S. citizens on the warden list. Over 2,500 total civilians were evacuated.

The EAP must address this potential and plan accordingly. The EAP must identify primary, alternate, contingency and emergency assembly areas and major supply routes critical to the conduct of the evacuation. Anticipated medical assistance must be incorporated into every phase of the mission involving evacuees. Evacuees will arrive at the NEO site in various states of health. Some may even have to be evacuated due to physical incapacity. Weather related injuries must also be anticipated considering levels of exertion and anxiety within a large crowd.

The location of the primary command post for the operation must be identified up front and appropriately equipped. This facility the embassy's command and control node, and will be shared by all forces and organizations involved in the NEO. A detailed alert roster for key personnel must be developed, along with an acceptable method to contact them. The "F-77 Report," known as the report of potential evacuees is the key tool available that documents the potential number of evacuees and assembly time estimates. This report must be submitted to DOS annually by each embassy or consulate. In order to utilize the information in the F-77, a total description of the communications system available to the embassy must be developed. Often, a combination of communication systems such as telephones, short wave, and CB radios are used to contact evacuees. This worked in Sierra Leone. In Brazzaville, runners often contacted evacuees. Consideration must be given to the location of available vehicles. In both Sierra Leone and Congo, embassy motor pools immediately fell into rebel hands and were promptly looted. Evacuations had to take place with privately owned vehicles and the few official vehicles at the residences. Privately owned vehicles were abandoned at the evacuation site. Knowledge of the warden system and how to reach distant families

must be understood prior to any crisis. It may be a good idea to familiarize oneself with routes to these remote locations, as well as ways around probable roadblocks prior to crisis.

A sufficient quantity of class I supplies must be on hand, and current at the embassy and residences to sustain an operation which may last one week or more. In Brazzaville, the initial embassy plan was to remain in country and attempt negotiations with the warring factions as long as possible. The embassy staff felt that they had a sufficient quantity of MREs on hand for the entire staff, including the EUCOM survey and assessment team (ESAT). Unfortunately, when the first case of MREs was opened, the ESAT determined that the meals were not safe for consumption. The MREs were over eight years old, and the first applesauce packet removed from the MRE had the word “bad” hand-written on it in blue ink. Somehow, this meal packet had been packaged into a MRE and sent off to the field, eight years prior. The lack of food in the chancellery clearly changed the outlook of the operation and forced the Ambassador to reassess his diplomatic plan. Consider all civilian food available and utilize as needed. And finally, map products must be available in sufficient quantity to be used in the operation. These obviously should be kept on hand to allow the detachment, when ordered, to effectively link-up with embassy personnel.

Chapter four additionally addresses notification procedures and phases. Paragraph six states that to develop a realistic evacuation plan, the JTF staff should know how long it will take to assemble the evacuees once the decision to evacuate has been made.²³ Concessions should be made for evacuees who decide at the last minute to be evacuated, and unforeseen foreign national evacuees sponsored by DOS through

diplomatic arrangements. A reasonable estimate is to, at a minimum, quadruple the amount of time initially planned for and number of evacuees.

The joint publication initially categorizes the notification phases for both types of embassy crisis responses. The drawdown is the initial measure available to the Ambassador, followed by levels of a complete evacuation. In each condition, the Ambassador must request approval from DOS. Under a drawdown, authorized departure is possible if those who wish to leave seek approval from the Ambassador. He may also order a departure under drawdown, although most often for non-essential personnel. The first step in an evacuation is “stand fast,” where an evacuation is either not required or is temporarily impossible.²⁴ The next level is “leave commercial” where non-essential personnel leave by commercial transportation. The third level is evacuation, where “an essential skeletal Country Team” is kept to maintain U.S. diplomatic presence. The final step is Embassy or Post closing. In all notification phases, a deployed detachment will be well aware of the situation, and will be required to participate and assist the country team as required. If a situation warrants this type of attention from DOS, all host nation training will have been postponed until resolution of internal conflict.

Chapter four of the joint publication additionally describes personnel eligible for evacuation assistance. The consular officer, in conjunction with the Ambassador will determine who is eligible for evacuation. This is strictly a diplomatic function, and in both cases was handled as efficiently and effectively as possible. The Ambassador will establish a general policy of evacuation support to non-Americans seeking assistance. This will be the largest and most difficult group to organize outside of the evacuation site. Only a percentage of personnel requesting evacuation from Sierra Leone were eligible

for, and ultimately evacuated during NOBEL OBELISK. In Brazzaville, the security situation was so poor that residents only left their dwellings if sure to be evacuated.

The last salient point in chapter four of the joint publication addresses the host nation guard force assigned to work for the U.S. embassy. These are typically local citizens working for regional security firms such as Wakenhut Incorporated. Although often unarmed, they provide an effective conduit of information on the situation into an isolated compound. Unfortunately, they are quickly overwhelmed when heavily armed soldiers arrive at the compound, and must be reinforced. In Sierra Leone, rebels entered both residential compounds unopposed the first night of the coup. They managed to steal one vehicle. The second night, they came back to requisition additional items and were dissuaded by members of the ODA. The local guard force will stand to a certain point, and to save their own lives, will often acquiesce to the demands of dangerous men. They must be incorporated into any security plan and cared for. In Brazzaville, a member of the ESAT fed the contract guards from a barbecue grill behind the embassy. They had been without food for four days, and had remained at their posts. They became a great source of information, and often know a great deal about the local area and its lesser-known routes. They often are a key to success and must be properly incorporated and sufficiently considered in all actions.

The key points in chapter four relevant to the SFODA are: (1) Know the plans and review them with the embassy staff to ensure the EAP is complete and reasonable, (2) Understand the notification phases of a potential evacuation and assist as needed throughout, and (3) Do not forget the contract guards. They can be of great benefit and need your help.

Chapter five of Joint Publication 3-07.5 covers general employment of forces and evacuation operation procedures. Understandably, the focus of this manual is towards a force that must come from outside the country or local area to conduct an evacuation. Often, an SFODA will be deployed within the same country or area where the potential for a NEO is high. Fortunately, the military is most often viewed as the last resort in a series of evacuation options.²⁵ This often will provide adequate time for a diplomatic solution to be reached, or sufficient military planning to begin, incorporating the requirements and perspective of the Chief of Mission. This means the SFODA may be the only military force in-country during the critical phases for planning, assessing the situation, deciding the request DoD support, and awaiting arrival of additional forces (JTF).

The Secretary of State maintains the exclusive authority to approve an evacuation. This decision is made in conjunction with the recommendations of the Chief of Mission. Once authorized, the chief of mission maintains the authority to implement the final plan developed through crisis action planning. The primary information disseminated from this plan will include when the evacuation will take place, and what U.S. and foreign nationals are to be evacuated. Somewhere prior to this decision point, the deployed ODA will have been integrated into the planning process. As early as possible in the planning, the CJTF forms the advance party and requests permission to send it to the site of the operation. The advance party may consist of two elements: the Forward Command Element and the evacuation site party.²⁶

The Forward Command Element (FCE), only when authorized for admission by the DOS, will have many responsibilities during the first or planning phase of a NEO.

The majority of these initial planning steps can be executed by an ODA. For example, the joint publication directs the FCE to conduct reconnaissance to determine and establish assembly areas and evacuation sites.²⁷ If an ODA has developed a proper initial understanding of where it is training, or if it has been involved in the initial NEO planning with the embassy staff, this information has already been obtained. Members of the detachment may then only be required to confirm these locations with the FCE. This process additionally reduces the amount of planning time required prior to execution of the NEO. The joint publication then addresses sixteen tasks that the FCE should accomplish during the planning phase. Most of these tasks are appropriate and should direct the ODA to focus its planning in support of the CJTF which will conduct the NEO.

The first task is to obtain permission from the country team for the advance party to enter its country. This is a hasty operational country clearance. In Sierra Leone this was understood as fundamental and granted over the phone, without questions. The ODA can assist in defining composition and function of the FCE if required. Another important task is to develop and brief a communication plan for the advance party. The ODA, regardless of whether there are already DoD personnel assigned to the embassy, is the key to making this happen. The tactical communications that a team deploys with are the primary, only secure, and most reliable means of communicating with the JTF. Another task is to acquire and review appropriate maps. Again, the ODA must already have done this analysis, including information of military interest impacting on the mission. This must obviously be transmitted to the JTF as early as possible in their planning process. Another task is to review the EAP and its checklists. Again, the ODA will be familiar with both documents. Using their communications, this information must

be relaying to the JTF, either prior to the arrival of the FCE, or to the FCE itself. This initial analysis will support the mission of the FCE and minimize the amount of time they require to become familiar with the embassy's planning. Another listed task is to develop and brief an escape and evasion plan for the advance party. The ODA will simply have to incorporate and brief the FCE on their existing plan.

Additional steps listed in the joint publication are also easily accomplished by an ODA prior to the arrival of the FCE. The team can assemble and inspect required equipment, determine if civilian clothes are required, consider weapon and ammunition requirements, determine medical requirements, and examine the need for specialized equipment. Such equipment will typically be required to assist in executing the embassy's destruction plan, or assist in communications between the embassy and Washington or CINC headquarters. The ODA also becomes critical in identifying and supporting translator and linguistic requirements. Public affairs guidance can be relayed to the CJTF by the ODA prior to the arrival of the FCE to assist in preparing them, if required, for this aspect of the mission. Finally, in accordance with the joint publication, the ODA can review all available intelligence of the proposed NEO, obtain assistance in filling gaps created by missing data, and inform the CJTF of any gaps which cannot be filled. This portion of the joint publication clearly identifies the first CJTF element the ODA is likely to encounter, and how to prepare for their arrival and effectively condense their required planning.

Joint Publication 3-07.5 discusses the recommended size and composition of the Forward Command Element. Its composition is mission dependent and will have no impact on the function of the ODA, other than regarding any requirements for potential

expansion of the ODA evacuation plan. This chapter of Joint Publication 3-07.5 concludes with the JTF main body organization and missions. Again, the composition of the primary force is of limited consequence to the detachment. The ODA simply needs to remain cognizant during its initial planning of type and size of force, and any peculiar mission requirements such as landing zone, beach, or airfield.

This chapter of Joint Publication 3-07.5 contains a great deal of useful information for a deployed ODA. The key points for the ODA involve how the detachment will interface with and best support the JTF. Additionally, this chapter specifies requirements that the FCE will have upon arrival in country. The following additional tasks for the FCE seem ideally suited to an ODA and should be considered when providing a joint task force NEO support.²⁸ The ODA can assist the FCE in initiating liaison with the diplomatic mission. Ideally, the ODA has developed a good working relationship with the country team through its deployment and initiation of NEO planning. The ODA can provide a continuing presence for planning and ensure a complementary role with DOS personnel. The ODA can provide the JTF an effective military assessment as to where the operational environment is permissive, uncertain or hostile. The ODA can advise the FCE or JTF regarding the time, place, and method for the arrival of the evacuation force. The ODA can transmit and assist in determining the military implications of existing political and sociological considerations. The ODA can determine the attitude of the location population. Although not listed in the joint publication, the ODA can conduct detailed coordination with host-nation and additional military forces in the area. And finally, the ODA can establish and maintain secure, reliable communications to all required external elements, worldwide.²⁹ In Sierra Leone,

a small FCE consisting of the MEU commander, two operations officers, and small communications package was inserted prior to the main body. The ODA accomplished all aforementioned tasks in support of the JTF, and effectively assisted the FCE in accomplishing its primary mission. The Marine battalion landing team commander, Lt. Col. Thomas Greenwood, later said the ODA “made an invaluable contribution to our mission success because they raised our situational awareness.”³⁰

Chapter five of Joint Publication 3-07.5 addresses evacuee processing. At the heart of this chapter is the evacuation control center (ECC) flow chart. This flow chart details how the ECC conducts processing, screening and selected logistics functions associated with the evacuation. The key point to remember is that the JTF’s primary duties include maintaining order in the evacuation site and supporting the Ambassador’s efforts to care for noncombatant evacuees.³¹ This chapter further details classification, priorities, and consideration for evacuees. The consular officer, with the chief of mission, is responsible for all actions associated with the evacuation control site. These functions are specifically diplomatic and should not involve the ODA, other than to potentially assist if security concerns arise. In Sierra Leone, the ODA executed military duties that directly supported the evacuation control center. These included conducting reconnaissance and assisting in selecting the site, coordinating with the property owner to assist in providing adequate space for the ECC, coordinating with Nigerian peace-keeping forces at the site to assist with local security, ensuring that arriving helicopters were not subject to Nigerian fire, establishing initial landing zones, providing initial overwatch and security positions while the ECC was set up, and finally providing extended outer security positions to isolate the evacuation site. The key points of this

chapter reflect that the ODA may find itself providing emergency medical aid at the evacuation site, and may have to provide initial or immediate security if an unwanted situation arises. In Sierra Leone, on the third day of evacuations when the ECC no longer functioned, several evacuees were found to be carrying concealed weapons, including MP-4s and mini-uzis. This must be addressed during the primary processing when potential evacuees are allowed to enter the ECC.

Chapter six of Joint Publication 3-07.5 addresses intermediate staging bases and temporary safe havens. An intermediate staging base is located in a safe or stable country near the evacuation site that can serve as a launching point, and possible return point (safe haven) for a NEO. The joint force commander elects to utilize an ISB if militarily required. The DoS can also designate an ISB, specifically as a safe haven, if diplomatically required. The ISB's importance increases as the distance from home station and likelihood of hostilities increase. During Operation NOBEL OBELISK, ISB operations were not required. The 22nd MEU's command ship, the USS *Kearsarge*, served as the launching point for all operations. Civilians taken to the USS *Kearsarge* were flown to Conakry, Guinea, a DoS selected safe haven. An ODA may become involved in ISB operations for the same reasons that may involve them in a NEO. They may already be located in the ISB country or have operational experience within that country that enables them to substantially contribute to mission success. The joint force commander's decision to utilize an ISB is politically significant, and must be made in conjunction with the DOS to ensure the host nation approves of the arrival of refugees, and can support them. The DOS is responsible for coordinating with the government of that country.³²

This chapter also addresses primary JTF concerns that should be considered if an ODA is tasked to support ISB establishment in support of a NEO in another country. This ODA can be one currently deployed to the country in question for use, or any other surrounding area, provided it can arrive in a timely manner. The selected ODA should assess whether the location can physically support ships or aircraft. The ODA must carefully assess and develop effective communications between all responsible elements. The area should have adequate facilities to billet and feed involved forces, including returning evacuees if it is used as a temporary safe haven. The location should have storage facilities for needed supplies, and be close to acceptable major medical facilities. If not, the location should support the establishment of temporary U.S. or allied medical facilities sufficient for our forces. Operational security should be considered when selecting the location for this type of facility. Additionally, overflight rights should be coordinated with the DOS prior to the arrival of the JTF's advon. The facility should be close enough to the coast to enable aircraft or ships to be able to conduct the evacuation without having to refuel. Finally, and critically, the location should have adequate local and area security, either through host nation coordination, or with internal security forces that support safe conduct of the operation. In many underdeveloped areas, these requirements will be difficult to completely accomplish. The ODA, using its local knowledge, must make the critical common sense assessment and recommend the best location for this mission.³³

This chapter closes with information concerning a temporary safe haven site. A safe haven, designated by the DOS, is a location in an area or country to which evacuees may be moved quickly and easily.³⁴ Conakry, Guinea, was effectively utilized as a

temporary safe haven for Operation NOBEL OBELISK, and their support led to enhanced diplomatic relations with the U.S. Operation FIRM RESPONSE used Libreville, Gabon, as a safe haven. Again, an ODA may become indirectly involved in a NEO if it is conducting training in a country designated as a temporary safe haven. Many of the same requirements for an ISB are applicable to a safe haven. The ODA can assist in collecting this information with support from the country team and host nation military. Additional to ISB requirements, the ODA should determine whether the safe haven can effectively support the projected number of evacuees, and whether it is sufficiently close to major transportation hubs. Also, it is important to note that although the temporary safe haven operates under the authority of the host government, it may not have the goodwill of the local population. The ODA must carefully assess whether the safe haven can defend itself against the threat of potential terrorist acts or civil disobedience.

The key points relevant to an ODA from this chapter are to consider JTF requirements if involved in peripheral aspects of a NEO, and provide reasonable and timely military assessments and support.

Critical to the success of any NEO is the understanding of rules of engagement. NEOs are often conducted in uncertain and fluid environments. There are usually large numbers of civilians and a certain sense of panic surrounding evacuation sites. The operational situation is often delicate considering the magnitude of economic repercussions possible from lost diplomatic relations with the U.S. and other allies. A misunderstanding of the ROE or misapplied force can be extremely detrimental to the successful outcome of a NEO. Hostile forces may react adversely to what they perceive

as a hostile act against themselves, or friendly citizens of their country. Often, then the U.S. leaves, there is a sense that a small country has nothing to lose, and rebels or bandits react accordingly. Conversely, NEOs are often conducted by rather small operational elements that must be ensured of the right to self-defense. Such a small force cannot be hampered in the ability to safely conduct their mission. Appendix A of Joint Publication 3-07.5 covers the rules of engagement and the law of armed conflict. CJCS 3121.01, “Standing Rules of Engagement for U.S. Forces,” is the basic source for standing ROE, and includes a specific section addressing NEO.³⁵ The ODA should understand any additional requirements associated with these expanded ROE. These ROE will be issued by the JTF if appropriate. In NOBLE OBELISK, the Staff Judge Advocate for the 22nd MEU ensured that the ODA was advised on the expanded ROE. At no point were there any questions involving interpretation or application of the amended ROE.

One section states “Choice of a concept of operations depends heavily upon the ROE granted for the NEO.” Fortunately, during NOBLE OBELISK, the appropriate and logical evacuation plan was developed and executed under standing CJCS ROE. Another section states that defensive actions can be conducted only as aggressively as necessary to protect U.S. lives (and those of third country nationals), property, and equipment. Actions should be proportionate to the level of threat and should halt upon cessation of the aggression. Additionally, they may include pursuit only until the attacker is no longer a threat to U.S. personnel (and third country national evacuees), property and equipment. The ROE further reiterate an obvious requirement that all personnel must be instructed as to the importance of good order and discipline when conducting NEOs. Fortunately, this is a requirement in all military operations and comes as no surprise to an ODA. The ROE

further clarify that ideally; ROE should not preclude approval of requests for joint fire support if required (such as naval fire support and close air support). And authority for employment of riot control agents is available if approved by the combatant commander.³⁶

The primary expansion of the standing Joint Chiefs of Staff ROE into approved NEO ROE involves the inherent responsibility to protect additional U.S., and third country nationals. The NEO ROE provided to the ODA by the JTF commander is essentially taken directly from Joint Publication 3-07.5. It fully and clearly supports mission accomplishment.

The next two appendices of Joint Publication 3-07.5 address further legal considerations and psychological operations considerations for noncombatant evacuations. Standard military practices, initiated by the CJTF, govern how the ODA is commanded and involved in all NEO related operations. These appendices are ideally suited to the CJTF and staff.

Appendix D of the joint publication is a series of questions provided as a common framework for evacuation planning and operations. They may serve as a focus for the detailed planning between the ODA, country team, and JTF preceding any operation. An amended list of this appendix, more appropriately designed specifically for an ODA, will be included in the final chapter of this thesis.

Appendix E of Joint Publication 3-07.5 is a sample emergency action plan checklist. This checklist is taken directly from the DOS Emergency Planning Handbook, 12 FAH-1, which is still currently in use. Members of the ODA should be familiarized with the primary aspects of this checklist either during the initial pre-deployment site

survey, or upon initial entry into country. This information must be current in order to be applicable to an effective NEO. An amended version of this checklist, more appropriately designed specifically for an ODA, will be included in the final chapter of this thesis. The final three appendices of the joint publication address sample forms notices, references, and administrative instructions.

Joint Publication 3-07.5 is current and applicable to a Special Forces operational detachment involved in any of the operational aspects of a NEO. It provides a planning framework, along with appropriate operational guidance, which illustrates the applicability of employing deployed Special Forces personnel in NEOs within their area of expertise. This joint publication serves as the primary tool for an ODA to understand the mission requirements, and integrate itself into a JTF tasked with the responsibility to execute a NEO.

Army Field Manual 90-29, Noncombatant Evacuation Operations, 17 October 1994, establishes Army guidance for planning, coordinating, and executing NEOs under nonemergency conditions. Nonemergency conditions are those in which full mobilization has not been authorized, but deployment of combat forces or the use of force may be required to accomplish the mission.³⁷ Although associated with somewhat dated terminology such as “full mobilization,” this manual still contains some pertinent information complementary to that found in the joint publication. The majority of applicable information is located in eight appendices, and should be used to augment the basic checklists found in the joint publication. Understandably, the focus of this field manual is large-scale conventional Army units, no smaller than battalion level. Therefore, the information of most value to an ODA is that which reaffirms what is more clearly

defined in the joint publication. NEOs are inherently joint operations, and should be planned and conducted from that perspective. Therefore, this manual is a secondary source of information, and if used, should complement the joint publication.

Chapter one and two of this manual provide a general overview of NEO and organization of the embassy staff. Chapter three covers contingency and predeployment planning by addressing both the embassy emergency action plan and military planning for the predeployment and deployment phases. Some terminology in this manual differs from the joint pub, although the concepts are relatively similar. For example, the field manual recommends use of an advance party as opposed to the joint publication's forward command element. The recommendation wisely states that this advance party be small and inconspicuous to avoid drawing attention. Unfortunately, Appendix D, Advance Party or Liaison Team Guidelines, then recommends that the ideal advance party size is no more than twelve to fifteen.³⁸ Under permissive conditions during the planning phase, this sized element may indeed be supported by an embassy. Unfortunately, in a semi-permissive environment this size element may severely over-task an embassy staff's ability to provide adequate support. The opposed entry force must then infiltrate with adequate supplies. In Brazzaville, the entry team brought enough rations and water to support itself for five days. The embassy staff assisted in depleting these supplies. They were exclusively located in the chancellery, and did not initially have the means to sustain themselves. These problems developed due to their outdated EAP. The decision to insert a large advon, if not sustainable, may have political implications. If the ambassador desires to remain and negotiate a political solution, the advon must also have the ability to remain, and support the staff as required. The local

economies of both Sierra Leone and Congo were completely devastated. Normally, food is not commercially available during the time NEOs are being conducted. If the situation is bad enough to warrant U.S. evacuation, then local merchants close their stores and protect their assets. In Brazzaville, the local grocery store adjacent to the U.S. Embassy was completely looted, including display racks, in less than eight hours. Additionally, rebels held up other rebels at gunpoint over looted shopping carts full of groceries in front of the U.S. Embassy. The levels of food and water self-sufficiency ultimately dictate the time frame necessary for mission execution.

The field manual interestingly states that special operations forces, specifically Civil Affairs, have the best mix of skills and experience to assist in NEOs. They can provide the commander an economy of force measure for evacuation operations in general and advance party operations specifically.³⁹ The ODA commander must remember that Civil Affairs forces are combat multipliers for a tactical commander, and can provide excellent augmentation and expertise in support of NEOs. The manual further states that SOF units may provide the commander with a wide range of skills for an inconspicuous advance party. Although this again focuses on a permissive operation, the ODA commander can develop an understanding of where he may be intended to support this type of operation.

This section also focuses on the communications requirements between the planning elements and the embassy staff. These are critical in determining size and composition requirements for the NEO force. A force arriving “blind” without initial coordination with the embassy staff is not as functional as one that has had an opportunity to tailor itself, and possible even conduct hasty training and rehearsals. The

necessity of an advon is reduced in a permissive environment because of the inherent and still functional embassy capabilities. In Sierra Leone and Congo, the communications hub of the country was shut down. The presence of a military force with secure tactical communications became critical for diplomatic and military communications.

Chapter four addresses the deployment stage and the intermediate staging base. This information is similar to the joint publication and includes a cursory checklist of minimum considerations for building the ISB force. Chapter five details evacuation forces operations, and includes recommended force structure and evacuation control center (ECC) operations. This chapter also details duties and responsibilities for individual members of the operations center. The final chapter briefly covers safehaven operations. This FM concludes with eight appendices. Of note are Appendix C, Sample EAP Checklists, and Appendix D, NEO Planning Guidance, which include Advance Party or Liaison Team Guidelines.

This manual should be utilized with the understanding that the Marine Corps has Department of Defense proponency for noncombatant evacuations. They utilize the joint publication as a doctrinal guide. The examples of NEOs used in this manual are either USMC or SOF missions such as Operations EASTERN EXIT, DRAGON ROUGE, or FIERY VIGIL. This field manual serves as a complement to the joint publication, if a JTF is primarily comprised of conventional army units. However, SFODA commanders should start with the joint publication. It contains all the information necessary to be successful in the conduct of a joint NEO.

The operational areas of SFODAs include many new and unstable democracies. A detachment that deploys overseas for any mission must understand, and be prepared to

conduct, noncombatant evacuation operations. Basic tactics, techniques, and procedures, coupled with common sense will enable any deployed detachment to positively contribute to the safety of U.S. citizens abroad. Current doctrinal manuals provide the basis for NEO planning and execution. Joint Publication 3-07.5, and FM 90-29 identify the elements necessary to conduct a successful NEO. Every ODA should familiarize itself with the basic operational planning elements of Joint Publication 3-07.5 prior to deploying overseas.

¹Department of the Army, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Student Text 3-0, *Operations* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: USACGSC, October 2000), 9-12.

²Ibid., 12.

³Ibid.

⁴Department of the Army, Field Manual 100-25, *Doctrine for Army Special Operations Forces* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, August 1999), 4-9.

⁵Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication 3-07.5, *Joint Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures for Noncombatant Evacuation Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, September 1997), ix.

⁶Ibid., I-1.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid.

⁹Ibid., I-4.

¹⁰Ibid., I-6.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Ibid., II-1.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid., II-6.

¹⁵Ibid., III-1.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹LTC David Mamaux, American Embassy, Congo, Brazzaville, Congo, personal discussion with the author, June 1997.

²⁰Ibid., IV-1.

²¹Ibid.

²²Ibid.

²³Ibid., IV-3.

²⁴Ibid., IV-4.

²⁵Ibid., V-1.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Ibid., V-7.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Frederick L. Gottschalk, “The Role of Special Forces in Information Operations” (Master of Military Art and Science Thesis, Fort Leavenworth, KS: USACGSC, May 2000), 71.

³¹Ibid., VI-1.

³²Ibid., VII-2.

³³Ibid.

³⁴Ibid., VII-3.

³⁵Joint Chiefs of Staff, CJCS Instruction 3121.01, “Standing Rules of Engagement for U.S. Forces” (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, June 1997).

³⁶Gottschalk, A-1.

³⁷U.S., Department of the Army, Field Manual 90-29, *Noncombatant Evacuation Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, October 1994), iv.

³⁸Ibid., D-1.

³⁹Ibid., 3-8.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The potential for NEOs will increase in the future. The threat of risk to U.S. citizens abroad is high as long as regional, cultural, and political instability remain prevalent in undeveloped regions of the world. Special Forces ODAs will continue to be an important tool for theater engagement throughout the world. They will often find themselves in areas where unanticipated political and social upheaval destabilizes the current government. Therefore, they will be the primary assets to immediately assist U.S. citizens in danger. Due to their inherent operational skills, Special Forces will continue to remain ideally suited to assist in the conduct of noncombatant evacuations.

Special Forces detachment commanders must understand this potential for NEOs when preparing for deployment, and must anticipate the change in procedures from training to an operational deployment. The first challenge to a team will be a potential change to its deployed command/support relationship. This challenge is easily mastered by understanding the basic concepts outlined in Joint Publication 3-07.5. The second challenge to a team is to effectively communicate the local situation with higher headquarters. SFODAs always deploy with the tools necessary to execute this action. Often this communication enhances or complements the embassy's ability to make critical decisions and is the difference for mission success. Failure in one of these two challenges will undermine the effectiveness of any mission. Any deployed ODA, if properly employed, will provide great benefit to the country team during crisis. Effective

command and control of that team, coupled with its ability to securely communicate will demonstrate some of the true value of SF “global scouts.”

An ODA commander must clearly understand the command/ support relationship between U.S. military and Department of State when involved in a noncombatant evacuation. In both Sierra Leone and Congo, Special Forces military personnel were initially the senior Department of Defense personnel in country. In both instances, there were no U.S. Defense representatives or Defense Attachés in country when the governments fell. In certain regions of the world, Defense representatives are responsible for multiple countries, and are based in that country which either most requires their presence, or best supports their mission. In Sierra Leone, the ODA commander was the senior military representative in country until the USMC led JTF arrived. In Congo, the team leader for the U.S. European Command Survey and Assessment Team, a SF lieutenant colonel, was the senior military representative for the entire operation.

The most critical point to remember is that the U.S. Ambassador is the senior authority for the evacuation and is ultimately responsible for the successful completion of the NEO and safety of the evacuees. The Ambassador speaks with the authority of the President and serves as direct representative on site.¹ The geographic combatant commander in chief is responsible for planning and conducting NEOs to assist the DoS. He then orders selected forces to accomplish the mission. It is imperative that the Ambassador’s evacuation plan and the joint force commander’s plan for the NEO be supportive, coordinated, and fully integrated.² The ODA commander must be prepared to provide appropriate and timely recommendations and support during initial planning, and serve as the primary conduit between the country team and JTF. He must remain within

reasonable bounds of understanding with his recommendations, and convey all unfamiliar requirements directly to the JTF for resolution. The bottom line is to stay within your lane and make recommendations appropriate with your level of command. The primary goal is to assist, and not hamper planning by suggesting resources that are not available.

As previously mentioned, Executive Order 12656 directs the Department of Defense to support DoS with its responsibility to protect or evacuate U.S. citizens and nationals abroad and for the safeguarding of their overseas property abroad³. Based on a DOS-DOD policy memorandum of understanding the role of the Ambassador is further clarified. During NEOs the U.S. Ambassador, not the combatant commander or subordinate joint force commander, is the senior United States Government (USG) authority for the evacuation and, as such, is ultimately responsible for the successful completion of the NEO and the safety of the evacuees.⁴

The primary potential for command and control confusion for the ODA commander is during the initial phases when the ODA may be the only U.S. military force on the ground. The SFODA must realize that it conducts military operations strictly through guidance from its military chain of command. The Ambassador's authority does not include the direction or command authority over U.S. military forces under the command of a U.S. military commander.⁵ The Ambassador cannot direct the ODA to conduct missions or perform military duties. The ODA must follow its mission guidance and seek approval from its operational command for missions outside of that guidance. The SFODA commander is responsible to inform the Ambassador of what the team can provide. Do not conduct any military missions, if directed to do so by the Ambassador, unless approved by your direct chain of command. The ODA retains its

primary deployment chain of command prior to any change in status, such as upon the arrival of a JTF. Any ODA should be prepared to be attached to a JTF to assist.

In Sierra Leone, rebel forces broke into the two U.S. residential compounds, increasing stress on the official American citizens, and increasing the potential for violence. The country team strongly felt that the ODA would be better suited to support them if it were collocated in the capital. This move involved military considerations that had to be thoroughly examined by the ODA. Once the ODA determined that the move was militarily feasible, it requested guidance from its headquarters. Only after the ODA was told that this approval guidance had been received, was it allowed to move into Freetown from its training location. This type of cooperation between the country team and ODA is essential in ensuring an effective relationship. Both sides must closely interact for a NEO to be a successful. If the SFODA commander is the senior defense representative on the ground, then he makes the military decisions in support of the Ambassador's objectives. The bottom line is to coordinate and support the country team, and clear with your chain of command.

Effective communications are critical to successful NEOs. In Sierra Leone, Special Forces provided the only secure communications link with the approaching JTF. They additionally augmented the ability of the country team to communicate with elements outside the country. This communications package is standard to all SFODAs deploying from their home station. Therefore, the early operational link that all ODAs can provide to planning elements may be critical to the success of future missions.

The coup d'etat in Sierra Leone took place on a Sunday morning. No official American citizens, other than two USMC guards conducting shift change, were at the

Chancellery building (Embassy). All fixed communications capabilities were lost as the scene surrounding the embassy involved numerous firefights between rebels, loyal Sierra Leone soldiers, and Nigerian ECOMOG soldiers. Upon reacting to gunfire on its compound, the ODA attempted to contact the embassy. One of the first services to be cut off in Freetown was the telephone system. The ODA managed a few calls throughout the day, interspersed with hours when the telephone system was not operational. All initial communications to any higher headquarters informing them of the situation in Freetown were from the ODA. Through secure, tactical means, the ODA provided timely and accurate reporting of the situation on the ground. Early attempts to contact the Charge D'affairs often met with difficulty due to the nature of the telephone system. When available, the primary system to contact the country team was to use satellite telephone to call a communications relay station on Ascension Island. They then transferred the data to radio mode, and sent the transmission to a receiver at the lower embassy residential compound. Although complex, the system worked and proved to be relatively reliable.

Upon arrival in Freetown, the ODA established the only direct secure link to the approaching JTF. This link allowed the ODA and country team to update the CJTF on the local situation and status of planning. This link was utilized by the Charge D'affairs to confirm arrangements with the CJTF and conduct direct coordination prior to the arrival of the Forward Command Element from the JTF. The communications provided by the ODA were critical to the success of this mission, and greatly reduced the amount of planning time and uncertainty of the operation.

In Brazzaville, the deploying team brought a robust communications package that also enhanced the Ambassador's ability to direct the NEO. Additionally, the

communications package provided the only link to French forces actually conducting the majority of the evacuations. The drive to the airfield to confer with French forces became hazardous due to the continuing fighting between the three factions. With language skills provided by a Special Forces officer, the ESAT directly conducted radio coordination with the French HQ for vehicle and aviation support to assist in evacuating U.S. personnel. This portable link again proved critical to the success of the mission. Communications are one of the key elements that Special Forces can provide to noncombatant evacuation operations.

NEOs are military operations that are typically required on short notice. Additionally, they contain no margin for error. SFODAs must focus on their METL tasks for effective training. Since NEOs are rare and currently non doctrinal SF operations, they should not supercede any METL training. An SFODA trained to its METL standards possesses the tools to successfully accomplish any NEO. The following checklist will enable a deployed SFODA, using its current training level, to be better prepared for an unexpected NEO. This is a condensed list from the joint and Army doctrinal manuals, and should serve as a background for initial planning associated with any deployment. Joint Publication 3-07.5 should be consulted in its entirety if a NEO becomes imminent in a deployed SFODA's AOR.

1. Know your area of travel and determine the stability of its government for the duration of your deployment.
2. Take a look at the embassy's EAP, ensure it is up to date, and validate any key information if appropriate (LZs, evacuation site, communications plan, availability of supplies, etc.).

3. Know the number of potential evacuees in country, generally where they are, and where they will need to go if required to evacuate.
4. Know what host nation forces, if any, can support or hinder a NEO.
5. Know your ROE and how it may change for a NEO.
6. Understand and develop a professional working relationship with the country team.

Deployed SFODAs are operationally suited to assist in noncombatant evacuations. The multitudes of skills they can provide to a JTF commander greatly enhance the execution of a NEO. Simple premission preparations can ensure that all SFODAs understand the basic requirements of NEOs and are prepared to transition from training to immediate conduct of operations. NEOs are challenging operations that are conducted in close concert with the U.S. country team. It remains imperative that deployed SFODAs develop first rate working relationships with those country teams and are prepared to assist under guidance from their military chain of command. NEOs often involve language requirements, a detailed understanding of foreign forces and cultural issues, and first hand knowledge of the local geographic area. If available, the SFODA deployed to that region of the world is the force best suited to assist in the conduct of a NEO.

¹Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication 3-07.5, *Joint Tactics, Techniques, and Procedures for Noncombatant Evacuation Operations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, September 1997), vii.

²Ibid., vii.

³Ibid., I-1.

⁴Ibid., I-2

⁵Ibid., II-2.

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